



鈴木大輔
Daisuke Suzuki
Illustration
閏月戈

MF文庫





「さて、あたしの自慢のハーレムを紹介するぜ」

「こいつはあたしの愛人一号、姫小路秋子。」

いつだってあたしの命令には絶対服従のカワイイやつさ。

ちなみに弱点は耳たぶと首すじな」



「で、これがあたしの愛人二号、那須原アナスタシア。

普段はツンと澄ましてるヤツだけど、

あたしとふたりきりの時だけはこういう顔を見せてくれるんだ」

「ちなみに弱点は二の腕さ。

ちよつといじめただけでもカワイイ声で啼いてくれるんだぜ」





「でもってこいつは愛人三号、猿渡銀兵衛春臣。

小学生みたいな見た目だけど、感度の方は立派な大人なんだわ。

口ではイヤと言いつつこんな顔するあたり、

ギャップ萌えの生きたお手本だよな。ふふ、カワイイやつだぜ」







April 14th, 6:00 A.M. (St. Liliana Academy - Student Dormitory)

“Ya and yer sister ain’t really blood-related, are ya?”

It was the morning after all of the student council members had finally moved in. The fuss was over, and my sister and I had spent the rest of the night in our own rooms.

The words that the student council president, Nikaidou Arashi, had thrown at me caught me completely off-guard. They dealt me a critical blow.

It hit me splendidly, and I fear it pleased her a lot. I was shaking badly.

—How does she know?

Even the Arisugawa Family and Takanomiya Family aren’t aware of it.

My parents covered it up so thoroughly that even my sister doesn’t know about it. Only a handful of people know.

So why, out of all people, does Nikaidou Arashi know too?!

Is she trying to trick me into revealing it? No, it doesn’t feel that way. Judging from her smirk, she knew that I’d tremble awkwardly when she discloses the secret, and it doesn’t feel like she’s just blatantly lying to screw with me.

So, what is she aiming for? And... why now? My story was already full of gaps, so she had many other opportunities to strike. Right now it’s just the two of us. Why did she decide to directly reveal it face-to face? Is this just a lucky shot? If not, how long has she known? Does anyone else know too? If so, is this other person or group linked to her or not—

My judgement was fast in its own way, and these thoughts raced by in the blink of an eye.

And after a short pause, I’ve presented the fruits of my thinking:

“WH-WH-WH-WHAAAAAAAAAAT?!”

I opened my mouth and eyes wide, and grandly bent my back.

I went further, putting my hands on my cheeks in the pose they used on those horror manga covers.

...Well, basically...

You know, imagine this pose, and then imagine it done with terrible stupidity. You now have my reaction.

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

The president isn't reacting to my full-body response at all. She just keeps smirking in that ill-natured way.

No, maybe it's that? Isn't her expression the one that people have when they see a totally lame joke? If it's a simple thing like that, then I have to follow up with something that diverts from the truth of my reaction, huh? Something like...

“...Ah— Let's see, something like that. In other words, I judged that something like this'd be the best reaction in this situation. You can hardly blame me. It was just too sudden.”

“ ”

“No, no. Nonono, please don't misunderstand, alright? If I'd had the time, I could've shown a different reaction too. Anyway, it's because I have an outstanding talent, you see, it's enough that Nasuhara-san invited me to form a two-man comedy duo, right...?”

“ ”

“Err— ...Yeah, Sorry. I'll be quiet. If a person that slipped once tries to run in pursuit, it can't turn well. But let me explain nonetheless. Because I think this was prez' fault just now, right? Bringing up birthplaces is too unusual. It's not just me, others wouldn't keep up with it, either. Furthermore, if you play a pass more gently^[1], it's more likely to slide through the opponent's defense, you know?”

“ ”

“...Err—”

But her smirk still licked me all over while she remained silent.

What a nasty person indeed. Not just with the sexual harassment, but also her personality. She's like the worst kind of audience, someone who enjoys seeing a performer slip while they hurry onto the stage. Is there anything one could call this conversation other than totally cruel? No, there isn't. Absolutely nothing.

“That da end 'round there?”

To me, who was now sulking in silent protest, prez opened her mouth at last.

“Well, that was some big deal. Yer almost like a raccoon, aren't ya? Say, a guy who can ad-lib in a situation like that's really rare, ya know?”

While tapping her shoulder with the back of her bokutou, she said:

"I gave it mah all to beat a crack into that solid-looking defense of yers. I would've never guessed ya'd pull that off so quickly. If I didn't know any better I wouldn't have noticed, eh?"

"U-Uh-huh..."

"Luckily, I kept mah eyes open, waiting for the moment where ya'd reveal yer true colors, eh? Where did ya learn to deceive people like that? Huh?"

"Ehm, well, from the TV, I guess? I've lived in the Kansai region before. It's the home of comedy, so..."

"Yeah, nah, it's fine. Don't bother tryin' to think of another way to fool me."

The prez forced a smile and shook her head.

"So ya could say that ya and yer sister are complete strangers. I ain't havin' no intention to do anythin' with it, ya know? Like threatenin' you with that 'n stuff. Ya can rest assured, ya know."

"Uh-huh."

"Ah, but usin' that as a bargain chip to approach ya in sexual stuff, wonder if that'd be alright?"

"No chance."

"Why not, eh? As cold as ever, ha?"

In response to my immediate reply, prez laughed a 'kakaka'.

"But lemme say this too: It's not like I don't understand how ya feel, but ya don't need to be so guarded."

"No, well... I just feel that prez' sexual urges are more than enough to keep me on guard."

"If I had to say, the secret hasn't come out yet because from how ya guys act, no one would doubt you were siblings."

Ignoring how I was still playing dumb, she continued:

"DNA tests could blow da whistle in one go. Actually, there'd already be plenty of hair and whatnot from livin' under the same roof as ya. Maybe I should give it a try."

"Your words are as ridiculous as ever, President."

"Mah evidence of choice, however, would of course be yer pubic hair."

"I'm sorry, 'ridiculous' isn't the right word. 'Criminal' is more like it."

"Ah, of course only the pubic hair growin' between yer legs, ya know? Not under yer arm."

“And now you’ve been demoted to sexual offender in my head.”

“Kakaka. Yer heartless as always, eh? Or rather, yer a guy who doesn’t bend to stubbornness. Yer hard to handle, but... the type of guy ya are, I don’t dislike it.”

Prez shrugged her shoulders and said:

“Aight, gotcha. So, let’s do some hypothetical talkin’.”

“Hypothetical talking?”

“If somehow ya ‘n Himenokouji Akiko happened to not be real siblings, or somethin’ like that. Everythin’ from now on is complete fantasy, just some wild ideas, got it? Well, go along with senpai’s hobby, will ya?”

“Yeah... Well, *assuming* it was like this...”

My default plan was feign ignorance. However, I wanted to find out why the prez knew about this top-secret matter, or how she came to that conclusion at least. This matter had a big impact on my future, after all.

“Ya might say, ‘how did ya...’ – of course, only hypothetically speakin’ – ‘...learn the truth about somethin’ like this?’ Matter of fact, the answer’s quite simple. Do ya know it?”

“Not a clue. This is just hypothetical talk anyway...”

“Think a bit before ya talk, will ya? Don’t be like, ‘Not a clue’, ‘dunno’, end of story. This conversation’s thrillin’. Let’s enjoy it some more.”

“Yeah, yeah, I got your point... Let’s see... Then, you already mentioned this, but did you actually do a DNA test?”

“That’d really be a simple answer, but I was never that interested in ya and yer sister’s blood relationship to begin with, ya know? Ya wouldn’t do somethin’ like that for no reason, would’cha? Moreover, I had no reason to doubt that you two were siblings either.”

Hmm, I see.

I get what she means. Indeed, my father had relied on this aspect of human psychology to keep this a secret. People simply don’t stick their noses into things they don’t care or don’t want to know about.

“Aight now. Got another answer, chap?”

“Yeah, that’s right... Well then, maybe you stumbled on it by sheer chance?”

“Yer the kinda guy who fills in multiple answers in da answer column at the same time. But are there really coincidences in this world?”

“Aah— Maybe not...”

“But, well, yer guess is close at least. Now about how I learned yer guys’ secret — ah, of course that’s if there was a secret — it was basically somethin’ like a chance

encounter.”

“Then I answered right after all?”

“Ya think that sorta answer’s good enough? If I asked, ‘What’s 123 x 456?’ and ya answer, ‘It’s a natural number’ what’cha think I’d say then?”

“That might be true, but...”

“Well, I was givin’ some hints. Think about it a little longer.”

“Err, I don’t really mind, but... you’re holding a question and answer game this early in the morning... Even though I don’t have any free time...”

“That’s why yer look so displeased, eh? But if ya can guess it, I’ll let ya make love to mah body for one whole day, ya know.”

“So you’re winning in any case?”

...And I’m being punished either way.

“Now c’mon, think about it more. Get to it, faster!”

Not listening to my troubles, prez urged me more.

I honestly don’t like it, but I can’t figure it out. I want to put an end to this as soon as possible. Ah, feigning ignorance is a great way to burn calories——

“Because yer actually my little brother. Ye, that’s right, you.”

“.....Huh?”

“I said yer my little brother. The very you sittin’ there.”

“Uh-huh...”

Upon hearing those shocking words, my surprise was genuine this time.

“...Now listen. If you’re telling me to figure it out, then why would you give it away while I’m still thinking about it?”

“I do it that way for the extra surprise, ya see— ‘cause surprisin’ people is part of mah lovely nature.”

“It’s bothering me, so please stop it. Or perhaps... huh? It was a joke, right?”

“Wanna take a DNA test?”

“...”

The president spoke those words with an easygoing attitude. It couldn’t tell whether she was telling the truth or not.

Of course, normally I would’ve laughed it off as absurd. It wasn’t anything worth taking seriously, and even if it was true in the first place, it’d be nothing one would reveal here and now. Since it was her, wouldn’t she have had countless other chances to strike? Wasn’t this the blatant trickster Nikaidou Arashi, who made it a hobby to trick

and surprise people?

“Well, yer reaction’s natural. Bluntly put, I reacted the same way. Anyhow, I only just learned the truth the day before I moved here.”

Although she still enjoyed watching me be at a loss for words, prez seemed to be talking in a serious tone.

Until then, I didn’t know who my biological parents were, so it certainly wouldn’t be surprising if I had a blood-related sibling.

“Well, there’s more: you’re just bein’ *called* honorable little brother.”

“Ah. Is that it? But we’re not related by blood, right...?”

“No, bloodwise, we’re cousins. My Family does adoptin’ ‘n stuff, ya know? It’s complicated.”

“Is it like that? Hee...”

“In other words, even though we’re cousins, havin’ a sexual relationship ain’t no prob. So don’t be depressed, aight?”

“You can be sure that I’m not.”

More like I don’t intend to have a sexual relationship with her to begin with.

Well, but I get it now.

So I’m Nikaidou Arashi’s cousin.

If this is true, it’d soften the shock, but... No, just me being related to prez is already enough of a shock. But is it really true?

“Well, one way or the other, the circumstances are hard to explain, ya know.”

As if she had read my mind, prez shrugged her shoulders.

“Also, mah honorable father and mother seem to hold a grudge ‘bout yer involvement with the Takanomiya ‘n Arisugawa Family or somethin’, ya know? Well, I ain’t havin’ the slightest interest in family quarrels and stuff. They can do whatever they wanna as long as it doesn’t affect me, but anyhow, that’s the truth. If ya still won’t believe me, we can do that DNA test.”

“...”

“But why would the Nikaidou’s know these things? Again, the answer’s simple. Your biological mother was a member of the Nikaidou house. The Nikaidous even helped your parents to hide this fact.”

“...”

“In any case, the Takanomiya Family got the short end of da stick. They thought they’d adopted the Himenokouji family’s eldest son, but you’re really a Nikaidou. Everything’s fine since no one else knows, but things’ll get complicated if it gets leaked .”

“ ... ”

“Hm, as expected, yer raccoon-style came to light, eh? But it’s alright, ’cause yer idiotic face is also quite arousing.”

“...Well, these are all daydreams and fantasies prez’ got from idle gossip anyway.”

“Ya bet. That’s exactly right.”

Nikaidou Arashi gave a big nod.

“Because this is just idle gossip, I ain’t gonna spread rumors. Today, this was just for fun... Yer and mah relationship ain’t changed. Some things just don’t, ya know? Now then, I’m a bit cold.”

Then, while walking to the entrance hall, she turned around.

“It’s chilly even though it’s spring, so I’m gonna wipe mah sweat and get changed. Sorry, Himenokouji Akito, for makin’ ya have this idle chat with me.”

“...No. I don’t mind.”

“Don’t ya worry. I’m ya ally, ya know. At least for now. I like people like you, and I don’t care about all this family stuff.”

“Thank you very much. That feeling’s mutual, you know? However, It’d be nice if you stopped dropping sexual hints all the time.”

“Kakaka, that’s impossible alright. Mah sexual desires are just beyond control. —— Aah, that’s right, forgot to ask one more thing.”

Prez looked over her shoulder in my direction.

It was that face again; she was smirking without even trying to hide it.

It was that bad feeling again. I braced myself for what was coming next.



And Nikaidou Arashi, as scary as a hawk or a reptile, shook my world again:

“By the way, I heard ya have some kinda fiancée?”

Notes

1. Football. Soccer for ye Americans.

April 14th, 12:15 P.M. (St. Liliana Academy - Student Council Room)

“——Onii-chan. Onii-chan, hey!”

“...”

“Onii-chaaan. Oooi. Ya-hooo~ Can you hear meee?”

“...Huh? Ah, yeah. I can hear you.”

St. Liliana Academy's student council room. Lunch time.

My sister's calls brought me back to reality.

“Daydreaming like this... what's wrong? Is something on your mind?”

“Ah— No, nothing important.”

I smiled at my worried sister.

“My mind wandered because I lack sleep, that's all. You know, there was a lot going on yesterday until late.”

“Is that so? But Onii-chan, you look like you're depressed, or how should I put it, in low spirits. I'm a little worried.”

“No, no. There's nothing to worry about.”

“Perhaps the bento wasn't to your liking?”

“You made it with Ginbei, right? There's no way it wouldn't be good.”

“Then are you hurt somewhere?”

“It's not that either.”

“I-It couldn't possibly be *that*, right? You're thinking about leaving me, your wife, for another woman?!”

“Yep, you're saying inappropriate stuff again.”

“Aye, even Himenokouji Akito has a bad day sometimes.”

The prez cut in while sipping her after-meal tea.

“He's got a cunnin' face, but that guy's still just 16. It's a troublin' age for youngsters, so it ain't strange if he's gettin' bored, right? Not to mention we're in the middle of spring, ain't we? Say, am I right?”

“Well, yeah. Must be that, huh?”

I faced her smirk, trying to reply as calmly as possible. On the inside, of course, I was

far from calm.

That Nikaidou Arashi has a really nasty character. Just this morning she prepared those landmines for me, and I clumsily stumbled into them. She smirking like that because she enjoys my reactions, right? Yeah, it's not just her character, her hobbies are nasty too. It's just too much for me.

In any case, I've totally miscalculated. Not only does she know about me and Akiko, but my fiancée too... She's going to be hard to deal with. For now she said she wouldn't use it for blackmailing, and since she's the student council president, I guess her words can be somewhat trusted. But knowing her, she might be scheming something.

...

.....

.....

Hm.

I wonder if Arisa's okay.

She was shocked when she heard that I was leaving the Takanomiya House. We haven't been in touch since. It's selfish, but I hope she's doing okay. Although her attitude is still worrying me, I thought she was the most likeable among the Takanomiyas——

I mean, Reiichirou-san and Kyouko-san were in the wrong. They pushed that engagement to Airsa onto me without a care for my own opinion. And after they got her all excited, I suddenly left. She and I were both victims.

"Onii-chan. You're still thinking about something bad, aren't you?"

My sister glared at me scornfully because I was lost in thought again.

"That expression, how you breath, the positioning of your lips... Onii-chan must be thinking about some woman that isn't me! Please think about me more, Onii-chan! It's rare for us to eat lunch together."

"...You've got a point, but how could anyone read someone's thoughts from that kind of small gestures...?"

"Those 16 years of being Onii-chan's little sister aren't just for show. When it comes to Onii-chan, I can read all kind of things from just a movement of his eyelashes. I am, so to say, an Onii-chan meister^[1]. E~he~."

"That's not something you declare so proudly. If I were to put it badly, then you're actually close to an eccentric stalker, right?"

Then Nasuhara Anastasia butted in.

"I, however, am very interested in the details of that proposal. Who did you sexually fantasize about just now? Confess this instant, Akkii."

“That’s a misunderstanding, alright? Obviously, it wasn’t anything like that.”

“My, how filthy. You not only surrendered yourself to your dirty delusions, but you’ve already finished swiftly under your desk, haven’t you?”

“I haven’t finished anything! What are you saying, you...”

“Your boldness, the way you’re getting aroused by your insatiable sexual desires – I’m inclined to say it’s almost refreshing. Fufu, it seems I’ve underestimated Himenokouji Akito as a man.”

“But... Like I’ve said, it’s a misunderstanding...”

As usual, Nasuhara-san was showering me with false accusations on a pro level. She always became lively whenever the conversation involved something dirty.

“I’m interested too.”

Next up was Ginbei, who followed up with:

“Putting aside that Akiko’s about to become a stalker, I think she’s reliable to an extent. I agree those 16 years weren’t for nothing, and she does have a lethal case of bro-con syndrome. We’d normally laugh her off since you can’t draw any reliable conclusions from someone’s expression, breathing, or lips. However, this time she could be quite reliable. It’s alright, Akito’s sister, I’m your ally. I’ll support you with everything I’ve got.”

“Oh... Thank you very much, Ginbei-san... Or at least I think I should thank you for saying ‘I support you’ with a smile... But somehow I don’t really feel I should be thankful here. Why on Earth is that so, I wonder...”

It’s because of that, Akiko.

She’s acting like she’s praising you, but you’re actually being mocked, right? Right?!

“So, what’s the meanin’ of this, Akito? Which girl were you thinkin’ about? Be obedient and confess. Now.”

“No, no. How did it end up like this?”

“Why would you even ask ‘How’? I’m a close friend — naturally I’d want to know about your relationship with your other friends.”

“No, well, maybe, but...”

“What else is there? Are you tryin’ to hide something from me?”

“No, of course not..”

“If so, out with it. Who’re you thinkin’ about? Someone in this room? Or someone outside?”

“Ah— No, you see...”

What’s going on?

Somehow I ended up being interrogated... How did I get forced into this? I expected as much from Akiko, but pokerface Nasuhara-san and the still extremely calm Ginbei-san have joined too. I don't think I can go against them with this kind of atmosphere.

It'd be bad if I confessed I was thinking about my fiancée, so I need to derail this conversation now.

"Goes without sayin' that he was fantasizin' 'bout me, ya see..."

As if the other three weren't already enough, now the president joined the fray too.

"Yeah, Himenokouji Akito was thinkin' 'bout me. While we were eatin' lunch together to deepen our student council ties, he couldn't stop thinkin' 'bout bein' all lovey-dovey with me."

"That is so not true."

Akiko instantly denied.

"President values lewd things more than the air she breathes. Her computer immediately suggests 'hentai' when you type the letter 'H'. There's no way Onii-chan would think about her. Onii-chan possesses a truly refined eye for women... although, for some reason, he has yet to make a move on his cute little sister."

"This is rare; we share the same opinion."

Nasuhara-san said with a nod and continued:

"It is exceedingly arrogant to harbor such delusions about a man indifferent to women's approaches. It is self-conscious at best. You do have absurdly good looks and a powerful personality, but I expected that you could objectively evaluate yourself. Unfortunately, it seems you have fewer merits than I thought."

"I support you all on this too!"

Now even Ginbei joined the war.

"But my theory is different: I think the president tried to deceive us all. She just told an absurd story to calm us down during lunch. It's a delusion — even as a daydream it's stupid — something others would immediately dismiss. Also, from how she said it with such confidence, it's likely that she played the clown on purpose—— Right?"

"Oi, oi, ya guys're overdoing it. I hold an elite position as St. Lialiana Academy's student council president, aight? Bein' a tad more respectful wouldn't hurt, hmm?"

"I'm not listening."

"I cannot hear you."

"Not listenin'."

"Kakaka. Nothin' but harsh subordinates here, eh? Well, thank ya very much."

While laughing out loud, the prez shifted her gaze in my direction.

“Is yer opinion as harsh as theirs, Himenokouji Akito?”

“Eeehm——”

I fumbled with my words, eyed by everyone in the room.

My next reply would be important, but I barely understood the situation. I needed a harmless yet effective answer to shrug off the question — something very hard to counter.

“Eh? What up? Ya hesitatin’?”

Prez urged me on with a smirk and a calm expression.

Going by that expression, it didn’t seem like she demanded a particular reply. Even if she didn’t like my response, she probably wouldn’t take offense and shrug it off as usual.

Right, that should be the case, but...

“Yes. I was thinking about prez.”

I answered with a forced smile. Even though this made me a coward, I couldn’t help it.

No one can blame me, right? She’s got me by my weak points, after all. Her intentions aren’t clear, so it should be safer not to upset her, shouldn’t it?

“Yeah, I thought about prez after all. It’s only natural, you know? She’s hard to approach, but just so beautiful. What’s more, she seized power in the student council, and now she stands on top of St. Lilia Academy. It’s a position that holds powerful authority, isn’t it? Before I knew it, I started thinking about prez all the time. I can’t help it.”

It’s better to stick with this, right?

Yeah, I’ll stick with it until the end, I’ll praise Nikaidou Arashi to the high heavens until it almost looks like I’m joking. Hopefully this’ll keep the damage low.

“As expected from the president. How do you know that I was thinking about you? Even though it didn’t show on my face?”

“Well, that’s simple. It’s ‘cause I’ve been watchin’ ya this whole time, ya know?”

Prez nodded with a satisfied ‘uh-huh’.

“Ya can’t help thinkin’ ‘bout the broad-minded, older, ‘n famous for bein’ a casanova me. It’s only natural that young and energetic boys would do that, ‘n I can clearly see their thoughts. Unlike someone I know who’s thinkin’ ‘bout her older brother all day long, mah eyes ain’t gone bad yet.”

“Wha—?! That’s unforgivable—!”

Akiko reacted immediately.

“I’m Onii-chan’s one and only little sister, the only family he has. That’s why he must

only think about me and no one else. Likewise, I only think about Onii-chan. Also, when it comes to Onii-chan, I'm the best expert there is... Therefore, the ideas that the president knows more about Onii-chan and that Onii-chan thinks more about her than me are things that are *absolutely impossible*."

"Himenokouji Akiko, ya can keep blurtin' all that, but the facts ain't changin'. Yer brother said it live 'n in color a moment ago. Ya heard it clearly, didn't'cha?"

"Mumu^[2]."

"But ya see, Himenokouji Akito ain't withdrawin' his words. Can't ya tell by his face? Ya smile so adorably all the time, yet ya could never charm him. All ya have is a spirit of an unyielding salesman."

"Mumumu..."

"While certain people were at a loss I did what had to be done. The nickname 'predator' ain't just for show, ya know? Ye guys should follow mah example more."

"Follow your example? That has to be a joke..."

"Ya may want it to be a joke, but face reality, aight? If ya refuse to face reality 'cause ya don't like it, yer ain't fit for this student council."

"Mumumumumu..."

Akiko puffed up her cheeks and stared at prez, but she had a definite disadvantage. The prez faced her with an expression as composed as a young Buddhist priest. She looked down on her subordinate, who was lost for words, and gloated with her smirk.

"——Quick timeout! A timeout's fine, right?!"

My sister swiftly raised her hand.

"Nasuhara-san, Ginbei-san! Come here for a moment!"

She called the remaining members and gathered them in a corner.

"Did you hear that, everyone? What's with the president's attitude?"

"Correct. Although the president typically looks down on us with vulgar confidence, today it's worse than usual."

"Yes, but anyways, I think she's got good reason to be confident. I don't get the feelin' she's just bluffin' to keep us in check."

"Then, are you saying something happened between Onii-chan and the president? Until yesterday, there was nothing unusual."

"Certainly, that is not impossible. In any case, one can't be too careful around that person."

"I have to agree with Nasuhara-kun. Be that as it may, what are we goin' to do? She's someone who's quick to act. The nickname 'predator' isn't for nothing."



For some reason they started a secret talk.

...Wait, I've seen this before. Is this something like a student council tradition?

“At any rate, it's certain something has happened between Onii-chan and the

president.”

“That’s correct. And this *something* is affecting our situation undesirably, is that right?”

“The problem is what actions we ought to be takin’ now, but...”

“I’m requesting your cooperation. Let the three of us join forces! No matter what, we cannot stay quiet and watch the president get ahead of us!”

“I humbly decline. You’re the most dangerous one among us. Don’t you have any self-awareness? It’s like chasing a cat and bringing in the tiger. Sorry to break that to you.”

“I agree with Nasuhara-kun. By my sense of values, lettin’ him flirt with president seems somewhat better than havin’ Akito flirt with Akiko-kun. Akito would be separated from Akiko, and, if successful, Akiko would drop out of the competition.”

“Please wait a moment! Rather than worrying about tomorrow or the day after, we shall join forces and tackle the threat in front of our eyes today——Rather, is this about stopping Onii-chan and me from sleeping in the same room?! I must object; I absolutely object!”

“Be that as it may, it’s clear that we can’t ignore the threat president poses.”

“I agree. I’m joinin’ hands with Nasuhara-kun again. We’d better restrain the president’s reckless behavior.”

“I wonder, does Gin-Gin have a good idea?”

“This is hard, huh? Anyways, first of all, we don’t know what advantage the president has. If we don’t know the cause, we can’t come up with counter-measures. Judgin’ from the current state, we can do nothing but improvisin’ as we——”

“Hold up, you two! Why are you ignoring me?! Please don’t talk by yourselves?!”

...Oookay.

I can’t understand them too well, but there certainly is disagreement about something. They’re saying stuff like, ‘Let’s work together’, or so, but it looks like negotiations failed. They might end up parting.

“Kakaka. It’s nice to see ya youngsters in such high spirits.”

Watching her subordinates acting in disarray, prez had the same composed expression as always.

While sipping her after-meal tea in an extremely good mood, she said:

“But, ya know, ya younguns have to be that way. Yer only havin’ unimportant tasks now, but types like ya guys are more promisin’ than those small-fry, petty officials, ya know?”

“Uh... Is that so?”

She’s criticizing us in an extremely high-and-mighty manner, but... she should be

roughly as old as we are, right?

"The St. Liliانا Academy student council gathers the excessively strong-willed by tradition, ya know?"

"Well, that's probably right. The people entering this academy have a unique personalities to begin with."

"Damn right. Every last one of 'em is hard to deal with, and on top of that, they're people with potential. Thanks to that, the person in charge is always havin' a hard time."

"...Is the student council a good example of this?"

"Ain't that obvious?"

Prez winked with her uncovered eye.

"Opposition 'n conflicts are natural, and quarrels are an everyday occurrence. And yet, the longer they quarrel, the closer they get. They were highly skilled people from the start, so if they unite, they should be able to give a good performance. Ain't that true?"

"Well, yeah, certainly."

Not to mention I had witnessed Ginbei's abilities with my own eyes, and I heard that Akiko and Nasuhara-san were famous in this academy too. If they worked together, they'd surpass all of the previous student councils.

"There's nothing important to do now, but we'll have to show our abilities sooner or later, right? At the athletic or culture festival."

"Damn right. Ain't that true?"

"But if they disagreed with each other at such a crucial time, won't it turn into a total disaster?"

"Mah... I'd want to avoid that kinda thing..."

She said and looked at the disagreeing comrades again.

"They say adversity strengthens foundation. As long as we can handle it, we should be thankful for all the adversity comin' our way."

"Right... Well, it's true, actually."

"The new school term just began, but the whole academy's somewhat restless. As student council members, how're we gonna be role models for other students if we ain't got our act together? I don't mind quarrellin' at the same time; it's better than bottling it up, ya know? But even if we're gonna to argue, we need to follow basic standards for our behavior. Even in those next-to-impossible rapid construction projects, first priority is to lay down a basic framework. Amirite?"

"....."

The way she said that got me thinking.

She could be described as arrogant, but maybe she simply anticipated just about everything.

Could it really be that she just did calculate everything?

Purposely riling up the student council while knowing she could control them – something like that?

“By the way, Himenokouji Akito. Would ya massage mah shoulders? This exhausting work got the better of me ‘n my shoulders have gotten stiff.”

“‘Exhausting work’, you say... It didn’t seem like you were trying that hard.”

“Superiors always have burdens their subordinates don’t know about, right?”

“Well, that... might be true.”

“Plus, whether it be great efforts or hardships, doin’ it discretely is just mah way of bein’ refined. Although ya guys might not’ve seen it, I’ve been doin’ all kinds of things.”

That’s probably true.

The dorm my sister and I only rented was set for demolition, but before we knew it, prez restored it to a fully-fledged student dorm.

She also got the board of directors to approve the budget, completed the dorm administration policy, and promoted all sorts of reform procedures.

We didn’t know she did all of those things by herself—— On top of that, she also had schoolwork, sword training, student council work, and so on.

If I think about it deeply, it’s clear. Even if her words and actions are ridiculous, she’s still the student council president——

“Also, mah breasts are twice as big as others’, which stiffens mah shoulders even quicker, ya know?”

“Right...”

“That means I’d want ya to rub mah breasts instead of mah shoulders.”

“You think I’d do that?”

“Ya remember yer position I assigned ya in this student council?”

“I’m the ‘secretary’s deputy assistant’, right? And you made it up.”

“The duties were secret until now, but the secretary deputy assistant’s main job’s to take care of mah sexual urges. Ya should take care of ya responsibilities now; it’d trouble me if you didn’t carry them out properly.”

“So you didn’t just made up the position, but the job description now too?”

“Why? As cold as ever, eh...? Well, it’s fine, if you massaged them they’d only get bigger anyway. Mah shoulders would grow even stiffer, kakaka.”

She said and burst into a big laughter that didn't fit her character.

How should I put it? As expected, she was unreadable.

I thought Prez would touch on my fiance or the blood-relation between me and my sister, but she was just her usual self. She even had a watchful eye on places that had to be watched.

If she was just a sex maniac or merely a capable person, she'd be easier to handle. However, she's both, and not only that, she can switch between the two at will, making her hard to read. She scatters wild balls like a baseball pitcher, and one with high accuracy at that.

Anyway.

While thinking it was amazing that the other girls were still arguing in their secret talk, I revised my first impression of prez:

Nikaidou Arashi—— She's probably an ally, but I need to watch out.

Notes

1. 'Meister': German for "master".
2. 'Mu': Angry/Annoyed sfx. "Mu" sounds cuter than "Grr", and Akiko's supposed to be cute.

April 26th, 9:00 A.M. (St. Liliana Academy · Class 2-A's Classroom)

Alright, I haven't had many chances to talk about my academy life, so now's the time for a brief description.

The private St. Liliana Academy:

As I mentioned many times already, the school offered consistent high-quality education from kindergarten to graduation. Its reputation traversed the whole country. Our high school division inside the area of the Yamanote Line was no different. It had an outstanding school building, equipment, and teaching staff. Everything here lived up to its reputation.

Right now the school was massive, with about 2000 students total. Of those 2000, 700 were first-years, and those 700 were split into 20 classes averaging 35 people each.

I was in class 2-A.

It was the first class in alphabetical order, but grade-wise I was nowhere near that 'first' rank. The academy didn't assign classes based on gender, academics, or career ambitions; it was perfectly random. Lineage and nationality didn't matter either, nor did having an influential parent give a student any advantage. This thorough fairness was supposed to be one of St. Liliana Academy's strong points.

I sat in the window seat at the back. I had secured, so to say, the perfect seat. I could observe the sports grounds where they held PE classes all I wanted, and it was in a quiet, blind spot most suitable for dozing off. I didn't concentrate much on academics, as I was always busy with novel and student council related work. Hence, this was the perfect seat for me.

Not to mention now was the first period.

And to make matters worse, it was modern Japanese.

For someone like me, who earned their meals as a somewhat professional writer, my modern language skills were pretty decent, so you can't really blame me for dozing off in class.

Anyway, I was having a hard time fighting my drowsiness while I basked in the gentle spring sun which was shining through the window.

“——From what we've read, we can see that the protagonist's mindstate is extremely complicated and difficult to describe at this point. After spending the whole day escaping the sealed room, he finally learned that somehow this woman, someone he knew well enough to call a comrade, was related to his mother. It's not hard to imagine how shocking this was for our protagonist.”

The Japanese teacher who was instructing plainly from the front desk was Saeki Shizuka Jiyoshi. She was also the vice homeroom teacher.

She was an awe-inspiring female teacher who had slit eyes behind her glasses and wore a good and smart looking suit. I recall she was around the same age as my editor, Jinno Kaoruko-san. Although still inexperienced, she held a graceful pose while teaching, and she also had the charms of being both naturally airheaded and unathletic. Because of this she was very popular among students.

Despite being unathletic, Saeki-sensei very skilled in chalk-throw technique. She'd mercilessly display that skill every time someone dozed off, so I couldn't let myself lose focus for even a second. I was a student of a famous elite school, so even though I had the lowest seat in the student council, I wanted to avoid a chalk blow on the forehead at least.

"...And now, as we head into the conclusion, we can see that the events foreshadowed in the first half of the book are being resolved one at a time. The moment our protagonist finally realizes the relationship between his departed mother and this woman he has shared this day with is in the final scene where he utters, 'You can do it, you can do it.' Now then, why would our protagonist, who originally despised this saying with passion, go as far as to say these words? ...Yoshioka, your thoughts?"

While ignoring Saeki-sensei's lesson with half my brain, my other half was fighting full-throttle to stay awake. Meanwhile, I pretended to take notes, but I was really working on an idea for a novel.

My behavior was risky and unbecoming in this elite school, but I had little time left, so I decided to take this gamble.

I did this for ten odd minutes.

Finally, the first period ended without incident and I was safe.

"——Okay. That's it for today's lesson."

Saeki-sensei, who had rushed through the lesson and reached a good point just before the bell rang, tidied up her textbook and materials, and continued:

"Does anyone have any questions?"

On hearing the teacher's question, a number of students headed towards the front desk. It was almost like they were dying to get there, and I marveled in admiration every time I saw it. Of course, I didn't admire them for something like excellent grades. It was the opposite. I admired them for putting their backbone into it and redoubling their efforts so they didn't fall behind.

On the other hand were those who didn't go to the front desk. Most of them either went to the bathroom or lightheartedly talked with their friends. Hardly any of them used the time to study and prepare for lessons. For students who could keep up with their classes, break time meant break time – it was something like this school's style. While it was a high class institution proud to be the nationwide leader in academic ability, people didn't cram-study to vy for first rank in entrance exams. I guess you

could call this one of St. Lilia Academy's unique traits.

Speaking of which, I was doing something along those lines...

After I finished preparing for second period, international history, I just sat at my own desk being bored and doing nothing. The novel work had to be done in secrecy since I couldn't pick up the notebook with plot memos in public.

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No.

It's not that. I don't want to be misunderstood.

It's not that I was bullied or shut out. It's nothing like that.

I was just a bit, just a tiny little bit, unable to fit in with the class. It wasn't that I wanted to avoid being treated coldly or that I was unwilling to talk to others, and I wasn't hated so much that no one would talk to me.

But it couldn't be helped, right? Most students in class 2-A had been together since freshman year, but I only just transferred here. It's only natural that I hadn't blended in yet.

To make things worse, I usually ate lunch with the student council members, so I couldn't eat with my classmates.

It was an exception among exceptions for a new transfer student to join the student council in the first place.

Plus, I had caused a commotion on the very first day, and recently there had been rumors that I was living in the same dorm as the student council.

It's only natural I was standing out, right?

But I had no intention to accept that I couldn't interact with my classmates, so I tried talking to them whenever I had the chance. Sadly, so far my efforts were fruitless.

...

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But honestly speaking, I knew very clearly why I had trouble fitting in. The reason was _____

"Himenokouji."

I was deep in thought, and before I knew it Saeki-sensei was standing in front of me. Seemed like her question and answer session had ended.

"How is it? Are you getting used to the academy?"

"Ah, yes. I'm fine, thank you."

"Is that so?"

With a nod, Saeki-sensei turned and glanced around the classroom.

Well, although I had said I was fine, it seemed my current unfavorable circumstances were exposed. My classmates had an 'I have nothing to do with him' expression on their faces, and they watched me and the teacher from the corner of their eyes. I was obviously left out.

"It's fine if you're climatizing, but please tell me if anything worries you. I don't know if I can help, but I can at least give you advice."

"Yes. Thank you very much."

"Personally, I can understand your situation."

Sensei said indifferently and gave me a sharp look.

"I heard that you didn't just transfer schools, but also support the household financially and are doing student council work. You're even the superintendent of the student dorm. I can easily imagine that you'd have a tough time."

"No— You know that?"

"I do. Today, you looked sleep deprived again. On a closer look, there are shadows under your eyes too, and you look pale."

"Eh? Is that really true?"

I didn't notice anything when I looked in the mirror this morning. This was probably because of the previous incident with the president.

"Yeah... I didn't notice it myself. Maybe I really am tired."

"Well, I think it's better than dozing off, of course, but it's unreasonable nonetheless. I'm worried about my students collapsing."

"Thank you for your concern."

"I'll take your situation into account and accommodate you in my own way, but no matter how much I help, health is a personal issue in the end. You should make sure to keep that in mind."

"Thank you. Your words are a great help."

"Nonetheless, do your side job in moderation, alright? If it's you, I doubt your skills for modern Japanese are lower than for your other subjects... so at the very least stand out a little in your exam."

...Uh oh.

Ah, seems I've been exposed. How terribly impolite of me to have hidden it from her.

"No, I'm really sorry. It's because my job's deadline is coming up... I always cause trouble for the person in charge, so this time I wanted to..."

"I know. After all, your editor keeps complaining to me in tears."

"Eh? Jinno-san?"

Jinno Kaoruko, 25 years old.

My editor's trademarks were a warm smile, drooping yet sharp eyes, and a childlike face that didn't match her age. However—— I didn't think she'd actually complain to Saeki-sensei. That was bad. Even though I only just debuted as an author, I already had a reputation as 'an author who can't deliver a manuscript'. I must follow my deadlines this time...

"Thank you, I'm sincerely sorry. How should I put it? I'm ashamed, really."

"It won't get better even if you bow your head... Well, as I said before, I'll keep your situation in mind. If you exercise moderation, then endeavoring in your side job's probably alright, and I'll pretty much pretend to not know about it. Biting off more than you can chew is a respectable aspect of youth in a way, but keep it reasonable."

"...I feel like you're telling me to do contradictory things. Like running while walking."

"But you've chosen this path, right?"

"That's true, huh——"

It was as she had said. I couldn't rebuke her.

However, I felt I didn't sow all the troubles I reaped...There was no point whining about it though.

"If it's the path you've chosen for yourself, you should see it through to the end. Also, you didn't take the entrance exam and got here thanks to one talent. You must continue proving that you have this one value until the day you graduate. Do you understand?"

"Yes. I'll engrave this in my heart."

"There is one more thing..."

"Yes?"

"Uh-huh. That's, well, it's probably none of my business, but——"

"Ya-hooo! Onii-chaaaaaaaan!"

At that time——

A familiar voice came from the corridor.

"I'm sorry for bothering all of you again, please excuse my intrusion."

Akiko entered the classroom while giving a well-mannered and proper greeting to class A.

“Onii-chan, Onii-chan! It’s me! Onii-chan’s cute little sister that he loves most in the whole world! I’ve come to visit you again today.”

“...Yeah. There you are again, huh, Akiko?”

“Yes, here I am ——Ah, good morning, Saeki-sensei.”

“...Yeah. ‘Morning.”

Towards the innocently greeting Akiko, Saeki-sensei’s expression grew a bit grim.

“Himenokouji, you’re in class B, right?”

“Yes, I’m in class B.”

“Then why are you coming to class A instead?”

“Yes, I’ve come to meet Onii-chan.”

“...Himenokouji. It’d be different if you had some reason to be here...”

“Ah, my mistake. I came to be loved by Onii-chan.”

“.....”

Haa... After letting out a sigh, she continued:

“Listen, Himenokouji. Don’t appear in other classrooms without good reason. You might be twins and all, but is there some law that you have to cling to each other all the time?”

“But Onii-chan’s *my* onii-chan.”

“...You’re a student council member, so you’re expected to be a model for the other students, right? Be more sensitive to decorum and have more common sense.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to say that to the student council president and vice-president instead of me?”

“Well, that’s certainly true, but...”

“Furthermore, Onii-chan and I are mutual lovers. It’s natural for lovers to always be together, and all the more reason since we’re twins. That’s why my visits to this classroom every break are the most natural thing in the world. Actually, the graver matter here is that Onii-chan and I are in different classes. I will bring this problem to the board of directors for deliberation at once. I will, without fail, secure the self-evident right for me and Onii-chan to spend our school lives together.”

“.....I see.”

Saeki-sensei could only sigh softly in response to Akiko’s excited declaration.

“You were the only one in the student council who was close to having a conscience. Well, even so, it’s true student council’s self-administration doesn’t have many problems...”

“Excuse me? Are you trying to say something, sensei?”

“No, it’s nothing. Anyway, a good relationship is wonderful and all, but exercise moderation, okay?”

“Yes! I’ll give it my best!”

“It’s that enthusiasm that worries me... No, nevermind.”

Saeki-sensei shook her head and left the classroom.

“Onii-chan, with that, the person hindering our quality time is gone. Let’s flirt freely until the end of break.”

“...You know, Akiko...”

While I sighed at my sister, whose expression was like a dog demanding food from its master, I said:

“Can’t you stop finding me every break? Or at least do it less frequently?”

“...? Why?”

“Because... You saw it earlier, right? Saeki-sensei was troubled, and it’s not just her. Other teachers feel the same way.”

Incidentally, that also included the class A students eavesdropping on our conversation — I even feared Himenokouji Akiko’s transformation worried almost everyone in St. Liliana.

Before moving, my sister had been a model student. She had it all: wit, beauty, and a cheerful smile. The students longed for her, or so I had heard.

But these days, like right now, she shamelessly displayed her unethical fetish: being an extreme bro-con. As things are right now, she looked like someone showing off their pervertedness.

Akiko’s behavior was the biggest reason I felt out of place in the class.

“It’s alright, Onii-chan. That’s no problem.”

“What do you mean, ‘No problem’? Then what is?”

“The people around us just aren’t used to our relationship yet. They’ll surely get used to it after a month.”

“No, you’re missing the point. They shouldn’t have to get used to it in the first place.”

“If you ask me, I think they’re already halfway there.”

“Halfway where?”

“Putting it another way, it’s widely known that I love Onii-chan, but up until this very day Onii-chan hasn’t shown similar feelings. This definitely is the problem.”

“Don’t worry, I’m properly showing it. That my sister can *not* be my love interest, that

is.”

“C’mon, Onii-chan, always gettin’ so embarrassed ‘n all. Did you know? Nowadays, dishonest people like that are called ‘tsundere’.”

“No, I know what a tsundere is, but you’re misjudging an important point. I’ve never been ‘dere’ to start with.”

“Hahaha. Onii-chan, your jokes are as funny as ever.”

Akiko glossed over what I said with a laugh while waving her hand.

Whether it’s better to call it being tough as usual or thickheaded, she really didn’t know how to be discouraged.

“Now then, Onii-chan. Let’s put this laughable acting aside and quickly get honest.”

“No, I’ve been plain honest the whole time.”

“If Onii-chan said, ‘I love you, Akiko. Let’s get married’, right now, then people might realize their misunderstanding too.”

“What misunderstanding are you talking about?!”

“The idea that Onii-chan and I aren’t lovey-dovey with each other: that kind of huge misunderstanding.”

“But that’s 100% true, right?”

“Fufu, it’s fine, Onii-chan. Stare at me with those scornful eyes. You really are just like a tsundere. I’m getting thrills.”

“Please stop talking like that. The class will really start to misunderstand.”

“Onii-chan, why don’t you just become an easier to understand tsundere?”

“Easier to understand? What does that even mean?”

“Just leave it all to me. If I, a worthy tsundere meister, deal with this matter, then making Onii-chan into a true tsundere shouldn’t be a problem at all.”

“Right...”

“Well then, please repeat after me. ‘Hmph. I definitely do *not* like Akiko at all!’ ...Okay, now together.”

“.....”

“Now, now. Don’t be shy. ‘Hmph. I definitely do *not* like Akiko at all!’ ...Okay, now Onii-chan. Ripiito afutaa mii^[1].”

“I definitely do *not* see Akiko as a love interest at all!”

“Buhaa?! It doesn’t feel tsundere at all when you say it so coldly! You’ve even changed the words towards the end!”

I eyed my writhing sister scornfully:

“Look, aren’t you satisfied already? The next lesson will start soon, so please hurry back to your classroom.”

“Muuuuuu—! Onii-chan’s acting cold as always! You’ve hurt me terribly! I demand an apology and compensation!”

“No.”

“Then leave the apology aside, just compensation is enough!”

“You won’t get a kiss, a hug, or a pat on the head.”

“Muu—?! Go ahead and crush everything I truly desire! Onii-chan’s too cruel!”

“Aaah, enough, it’s fine already. Come on now, please hurry and go.”

“Hmph, if that’s your attitude I’ll leave without hesitation. Next break I’ll make Onii-chan say even more tsundere-like words for sure.”

“Yeah, yeah, got it – I got it.”

“Ah, but please don’t get me wrong, okay?! I definitely don’t like Onii-chan at all!”

With that sharp parting remark, my sister left the classroom in a hurry.

After letting out a sigh, I was now alone with my classmates. Their gazes were hard to describe.

...Yare, yare. The same as always...

Whether I like it or not, I guess I’ve been playing along too much, huh? It’s only natural to feel out of place here when I’m part of an on-going sibling comedy act every break. And I keep getting those strange glares.

Yeah, from now on I should be more careful about various things. Yeah...

Notes

1. In “English”.

Same Day, 10:45 A.M. (Same Classroom)

It was break time.

“Akki, I wish to speak with you.”

It wasn't my sister but the student council vice-president with her trademark blonde hair and poker face (Later I found out that Akiko's next lesson was PE, so she didn't have time to play around here.)

“Um, about what, Nasuhara-san?”

“There's an old general store, called 'Elegant Wisteria', on the route to this academy. They sell a diverse selection of goods, ranging from sweets and bento up to their considerable collection of stationery. It's an old general store frequented by students of Liliana. It appears, however, that the couple in charge have disagreements almost daily. It seems they quarreled today as well. Akki, what's your honest position on this matter?”

“...I honestly think fighting isn't good.”

“I see. Fighting is undesirable.”

“Also, I don't think you need to be worried about this.”

“Well, that's quite the thing to say. Even though I graciously introduced this extremely hot topic to Liliana Academy, you reply with no hint of gratitude or respect whatsoever.”

“No, errr, it's just... Something like this isn't a big deal, you know? It's like a story about some foreign affairs minister fighting with his wife after she finds out about his affair.”

“I wonder, did something of that sort happen?”

“Errr, no, that was just an example. My point is that your story wasn't worth worrying about.”

“Perhaps, but even if it's not worrying for you, don't you think it is for the people involved?”

“Errr, well, maybe, but—”

“Remember the wife at Elegant Wisteria? Apparently, this time she couldn't take it anymore, so she ran off with the store's official seal and all the money on hand. Her current whereabouts are unknown.”

“Eh? Isn't that kinda serious?”

“And the husband was very displeased when he found out, so he ran off with the

store's deed... His current whereabouts are also unknown."

"...Sounds like a lawsuit's underway, doesn't it?"

"Additionally, the couple had a child who only just graduated from kindergarten, and they left him all alone in the store. Both of them have abandoned their duties as parents, and it looks like he doesn't have any other relatives either."

"That's incredibly serious!"

Is the kid alright?!

The police and child services are doing what they're ought to, right?!

"Um, so what happened to the kid? How's he going to survive on his own now?"

"Who knows? I wonder what happened to him."

"'Wonder what happened', huh... So you don't know what happened afterwards?"

"No. I know what happened."

"If you know, then tell me!"

"Curious?"

"Of course I'm curious! You stopped at the juicy part!"

"I see. Well then, if you swear absolute obedience and loyalty to me, then perhaps I wouldn't mind telling you."

"Isn't that deal a bit too much for just a rumor?"

"Then promise to become formally engaged with me."

"The terms are getting more severe though."

"As always, you drive a hard bargain... I suppose I'll have to be content with less. Becoming my sex slave will do."

"Um, sorry. I can't agree to something that unreasonable."

"Unfortunately, this is as far as I can compromise. I can't go any lower."

"Eh? What part just now was a compromise...?"

"Please don't concern yourself over such a trivial matter."

Completely ignoring my humble protests, Nasuhara-san took the seat in front of me. This seemed to be her natural seat, but it wasn't. It belonged to my classmate, Nanigashi-san.

"How's your health faring, Akki?"



“Errr, well, I’m doing fine, but why did you suddenly switch gears and call it a ‘trivial matter’?”

“Ascertaining your health is far more important than irrelevant gossip. That gossip isn’t

related to us anyway.”

“...I feel like that’s the complete opposite of what you said before, though.”

“At any rate, isn’t the weather lovely?”

Shifting her gaze to the window, Nasuhara-san changed the subject again.

By the way, today was cloudy, and, according to the forecast, there was a sixty percent chance of rain.

“Seeing such fine weather makes me want to go on a picnic.”

“So you’re insisting on calling it good, huh...? It’s fine, I’ll play along. Hm, let’s see. Well, a picnic sounds pretty nice. The cherry blossom season’s almost over, and the temperature will rise soon – a picnic would be quite timely.”

“Well then, why don’t we depart at once?”

“Eh?”

“For the picnic. It’s a timely event, isn’t it?”

“No no no, that’s absurd. We still have school, you know?”

I might not consider myself an honor student, but I certainly wasn’t going to ditch school and run off like some sort of hot shot. And besides, the weather was only going to get worse.

“You might say that, Akki, but there’s a saying that there’s no time like the present, you know? Also, considering the saying, ‘A horse comes from a gourd.’^[1] Isn’t it true something you claim is absurd can suddenly become reality?”

“Errr, well, that aside, I’m still not sure about skipping school. We’re student council members, so actually doing something like that is a bit... you know?”

“Do you know the saying, ‘Lose a fly to catch a trout’?”

“No, I know what it means, but how is it related to skipping school for a picnic? By the way, look around; the whole class can hear us. If we keep talking like this, they’ll get the wrong idea, right?”

“Incidentally, isn’t there also a saying that goes, ‘Truth comes out of falsehood’?”

“Give up already!”

It seemed like she randomly came up with that talk about picnics on the spot.

I mean, when she came here it looked like she had something to talk about. Shouldn’t she have something more important to say?

“No matter how unrelated, any saying goes, doesn’t it?”

With her usual poker face, she continued, unperturbed by my cold gaze.

“Going against the flow and utterly refusing to picnic; it’s not like the world will end if

you go. Act like an adult and go picnic.”

“...You’re using some pushy logic.”

“Is that so? This is only because it’s a pain persuading you.”

“If it’s that much of a pain, why don’t *you* act like an adult and give up?”

“I can’t do that. Besides, you’re half the reason our conversation got to this point, Akki. If you consider yourself a man, take responsibility.”

“Er... No matter how you look at it, it’s 100 percent your fault that things have come to this.”

“If you won’t go on a picnic, then you’ll just have to die.”

“Threatening me all of a sudden?!”

She was as crazy as ever.

It was almost like a child would say, ‘If you don’t buy me candy, then you’ll die!’.

“It’s because persuading you is a pain.”

“It’s a pain, huh? Please stop saying things like that... It’s especially scary when you say it with that emotionless expression of yours.”

“Well then, if you refuse to go on a picnic with me, then I’ll scribble in all of your textbooks.”

“Huh... Your threats are suddenly on a smaller scale.”

“I’ll draw mustaches on the photographs of important people in your history textbook.”

“So you not only lowered the scale, but you’re getting cliché.”

“Then how about this? I’ll write your name in all of your textbooks. Your full name.”

“Then I’ll be able to find my textbooks if I lose them.”

I think that would be a rather nice thing to do, wouldn’t it? Especially since I wasn’t the type of person who’d write their names in their textbooks.

Incidentally, my sister was the type who wrote her name on everything she owned.

“At any rate, no means no. I just transferred here, so I don’t want to embarrass myself. Look, everyone’s giving us weird looks because we’re having this pointless talk, right? That’s quite painful for someone like me, you know?”

“I see. It’s unpleasant to go on a picnic with me no matter what.”

“I didn’t go as far as ‘no matter what’ though. Skipping school is absolutely out of question. That’s all.”

“I-It’s not like I wanted to go with you on a picnic or anything, okay?!”

“Wha—?! Please don’t yell so passionately all of a sudden. Plus, it’s just wrong when

you deviate that far from your character.”

“I-It’s not like I wanted to go with you on a picnic or anything, okay?!”

“Errr, no, you don’t need to say it twice. But I mean, I don’t mind if you didn’t want to go. I have no problem with that.”

“You don’t understand, Akki. This is the ‘tsundere’.”

“Yeah... tsundere, you say?”

“Correct. In truth, my desire to picnic with you is so great, it’s unbearable, but I lack the ability to honestly express those feelings. I tried to play that character.”

“Right...”

But what timing. Akiko also seemed to have talked about something similar.

Could this tsundere thing be a secret boom among the student council members?

“There are a lot more people than I thought who can’t be honest with their feelings.”

Nasuhara-san said.

“If I can add more, not being very good at speaking their mind and instead needing others to sense the situation – for the Japanese with that characteristic, tsundere is just another national illness.”

“I think you’re exaggerating a bit though...”

“Plus, when people sympathize with the ill around them, we call this kindness. It’s the same with tsunderes. Therefore, Akki, you should also have more sympathy for tsunderes.”

“Hm, is that so? Well, I’ll try my best then.”

“By the way, I don’t like your little sister at all.”

“Yep. that’s not tsundere.”

“I-It’s not as if I like your littler sister or anything, okay?!”

“Yep. Even though you’re talking like a tsundere, I can’t feel any goodwill coming from you.”

“By the way, I think Gin-Gin is really cute.”

“Yeah, that’s what everyone thinks once they’ve seen her up close.”

“I-I want to pet Gin-Gin’s head and dress her in cute clothing because she always dresses plain, a-and It’d be nice if I had occasional pajama parties with her in the dead of the night, I guess?!”

“Aren’t you just blatantly showing your true colors now?!”

“By the way, I respect the student council president from the bottom of my heart.”

"But you don't really mean that, right?"

"I-I really think the student council president is a scoundrel, alright?!"

"Yep: that's what you really think."

Basically, Nasuhara-san set up one joke after another for me, and I kept on reacting.

Rather, am I someone fit for this? The president would probably go along with it easily, Ginbei would probably bail out soon after, and Akiko, well... she probably wouldn't have this kind of talk with Nasuhara-san in the first place.

"Sigh. Well, that's enough, isn't it?"

While I was really surprised at her reaction, Nasuhara-san nodded in satisfaction.

"That was good. You passed the audition."

"Huh? What audition?"

"The audition for the new duo we'll form."

"A duo audition? But it didn't seem like one at all."

"Today, I persisted in being unreasonable to you, and I confess it was a magnificent ploy to evaluate your tsukkomi sense."

"Eh? Weren't you as absurd as usual?"

"You know, Akkii... I've been thinking."

Nasuhara-san nodded repeatedly and ignored me.

"You know I've already confirmed your sense of comedy, right?"

"Well, yeah. You did say something like that."

"I considered introducing you to the Kansai Comedy Duo Association, but you did not seem especially enthusiastic when I brought it up."

"Well, yeah. I don't intend to live off of comedy."

When she had first said it, I had thought the whole introduction talk was joke.

Normally, you wouldn't expect to hear Nasuhara Industries' daughter and the Kansai Comedy Duo Association in the same sentence.

"However, on further consideration, it became apparent that permitting your talent to be buried would be far too regrettable. I wish for the world to recognize your talent... And, therefore, I've been thinking about how I might accomplish this every day."

"Well, I'm happy that you're praising me, but don't you think you're overestimating me here?"

"I'm not overestimating anything."

"Is that really so?"

"It is. You possess extraordinary talent. There's no mistake."

"Hmm... You'd really help me out if you could be more specific. What kind of extraordinary talent are you sensing?"

"If I say it's there, then it's there. But in any event, we can't go on if you continue with that indecisiveness of yours. Please make up your mind."

Uwa.

This kid gave up on explaining it.

"Anyway, after some thought, I arrived at a certain conclusion. You can't become popular as a solo comedian, but by forming a duo with me, we should be able to refine each other's talents. And since that's the case, you'll gladly accept my offer for sure, no?"

"...It's a naive question, but even if I did form a duo with you, why do you think I'd take the road of comedy in the first place?"

"That goes without saying. The idea of forming a combi with someone of my degree of talent is exceedingly attractive even to those only vaguely acquainted with comedy. You can't refuse under these conditions."

"By the way, I don't think you have *that* much talent."

"How rude. I'll choke the life out of you."

"...Isn't your boiling point pretty low today?"

She told me that without any change in expression, so that joke didn't seem like a joke.

"Your remark aside, you and I are henceforth a duo."

"That pushy again..."

"I also thought about our name. How is [Ana and Akki^[2]]?"

"Isn't that kind of name terrible?"

It didn't sound good at all, not to mention it wasn't clever either. I don't even think we could make it in the world of comedy with that kind of name.

"Well, you're free to propose your own suggestions. It won't be too late to make a final decision after I've heard them."

"No, I don't have any ideas myself, you see? Rather, I never gave you my consent to begin with."

"Well then, I should take my leave."

While completely ignoring my objection, Nasuhara-san stood up.

"If we combine our talents, we'll have the world of Kansai comedy at our mercy. Let's give it our all."

“...Somehow it’s getting bothersome to deny each thing you say...”

“Ah. By the way, I wonder if you wouldn’t mind having the picnic next weekend?”

“You’re still dragging that out?! Wait, then that wasn’t just a joke for my audition?!”

“Fufu. Good response.”

I had stood up and tsukkomi’ed without thinking. Nasuhara-san smiled faintly.

“As expected of the man that I have high hopes for. If we polish that tsukkomi, the day we’ll conquer the living rooms isn’t far.”

“...Ah, no. I didn’t mean to do that just now.”

“Don’t try to hide your true self from me – it’s impossible. I can tell that your desire for comedy is carved into your DNA. Your tsukkomi is inborn and you can’t run from it.”

“Muu...”

That couldn’t be true, but even if I thought that, I couldn’t deny that she had successfully lured me into tsukkomi’ing.

Hm. Am I unexpectedly dancing in Nasuhara-san’s palm?

“Well now. I’ll be leaving for real this time.”

Nasuhara-san said and turned on her heel again.

When I thought that, she turned towards me yet again.

“By the way, there’s one more thing I’d like to ask.”

“...What could there still be?”

“I wonder, how would you address me?”

“Eh? Nasuhara-san, right? Nasuhara Anastasia.”

“I wonder why, even though I’ve begged you countless times to call me Ana while reduced to tears, you still refuse to grant my wish? If you continue to not comply, I’ll exchange all your trunks with briefs.”

“...I’m in the trunks faction, but it’s not like briefs are a no-go for me. I don’t mind if it’s just that much.”

“But all of the cloth for those briefs is recycled from my used underwear.”

“Please don’t!”

If she did that, wouldn’t something restlessly stir between my legs? I’m a male high school teenager going through puberty right now, after all.

“Fufu. An adequate reaction. Even unrefined as it is now, it isn’t bad at all, but if you want to take it up a notch, tsukkomi techniques alone won’t suffice, you also need to study how to appeal to simpler emotions.”

Nasuhara-san said, nodding in satisfaction. She left, and this time for real.

Really, she's doing whatever she wants, like always.

With these events piling up, it goes without saying that I'm feeling even more out of place in this class now...

And also, about the story Nasuhara-san had come up with as a joke: the variety store matter.

From my later investigations, it seemed the abandoned kid was very capable. Even though he was young, he made use of various connection, tracked down his parents, brought them back, and made them reconcile. He also made them prostrate themselves for abandoning their duty as his parents. Even though parents raise and look after their kids, they don't always take after them, it seemed—— I didn't know whether it was a good ending or not, but it definitely wasn't a bad one – so I was relieved.

Notes

1. Means that something unexpected happens or that something is said as a joke.
2. Lit. means "Hole and nasty smell".

Same Day, 11:45 A.M. (Same Classroom)

And then the next break came.

“Yo, Akito. Looks like you’re doin’ alright.”

It was my good silver-haired, green-eyed friend coming to visit me in my classroom.

“Sorry if I’m interruptin’ you, but you got a minute?”

“Yeah, sure. Of course it’s fine. Yeah.”

“That seems like a rather complicated way to put it compared to just ‘sure.’ Want to try answerin’ again?”

“Ah, no. I just wondered if you might be a tsundere too.”

“...? What are you talkin’ about?”

“Errr, no, forget that, that’s another matter. So, what can I do for you?”

“Yep. I wanted to give you these...”

Ginbei said, taking out a neatly packed bundle.

“We made cookies in cooking class today. Mind takin’ one?”

“Ah, so that’s it? I’ll be happy to take one, of course.”

“Thanks. Can you give me an opinion on it right away? I want to hear it as soon as possible.”

And with that, we moved elsewhere. Leaving the classroom, we headed to a break area with vending machines and benches.

Even St. Liliana Academy’s handpicked studentry was proud of this place, and used this place to relax. Although it was only a short break, the area was crowded with students again.

“Come, come, open it up already.”

Having seated ourselves on a suitable bench, I opened the bundle at Ginbei’s urging. The fragrance of well-baked butter and sweet sugar spread into the air.

“Oooh. Seems like it turned out well.”

“Fufu, I think so too. It’s not just looks either. I guarantee the taste too.”

“Brimming with confidence, aren’t we? Then don’t mind If I have some.”

I picked a heart-shaped cookie and quickly put it in my mouth.

“How is it?”

“Yep, they’re really good.”

The butter was mixed in well, and the cookies had a soft texture. The hardness and moderate sweetness were just to my liking. They were freshly baked and hadn’t quite cooled down yet. Also, they had this warm handmade-feeling to them — a feeling one wouldn’t find in over-the-counter cookies.

I wouldn’t mind eating who knows how many since they were so good.

“Fufu. I’m the who can make things that please you the most after all.”

Ginbei smiled, satisfied.

“I totally know what tastes you like, and making cookies you’d be pleased with is my specialty. We’ve been *close friends* for *six years*, after all.”

“Yeah, that’s right, isn’t it...? Wait, why did you emphasize ‘close friend’ and ‘six years’ that strangely?”

“It’s all in your head. Besides, our bond has been unshakable for ages. Is there any need to deliberately show off our intimacy?”

“Hmm. That might be true too. Well, at any rate, these cookies really are delicious.”

“Eat all you want. I made them for you to begin with.”

“Really? Then I won’t hold back.”

Having gained permission, I picked up my second and third cookie.

*munch*munch*.



*munch*munch*munch*.

I tend to not talk while eating, so I unconsciously end up causing long bouts of silence. But with Ginbei I wasn't worried at all.

Hypothetically speaking, if Ginbei and I had been in the same class, I doubt I'd have been so isolated that my own classmates disregarded me completely.

"Speaking of which, Gin..."

"Hm? What is it?"

"Like me, you only just transferred into this academy. Have things been going smoothly?"

"What do you mean, 'smoothly'?"

"In other words, well, something like whether you fit into your class or not."

"It wasn't much of a problem for me; my classmates were all nice for the most part. Although, since I only recently transferred in, I can't say I'm friends with anyone yet, right? Plus, well, time's probably an issue."

"That so? Then it's all good."

"Although, it seems like I'm gettin' a bit of special treatment in class."

"Ah. Well, is it like that..."

Scandinavian hair color and eyes, and the appearance of an elementary schooler: when she, on top of that, talked somewhat like a guy, she was bound to stand out. Even in high school, Kiwatari Ginbei Haruomi had been treated like a rare species. The combination of her intellectual conduct and refined descent made her into something like an idol. It troubled the person herself though.

"Ah, right, right. Joinin' the student council also played a big part in it. It let me fit in more easily."

"Huh. Is that so?"

"Yep. I've heard it's quite something in this academy to become a member of the student council. I thought my classmates would be opposed to it since I didn't have any past experience, but that didn't happen at all. They reacted by treatin' me, someone of their age, with respect, and instead of distancin' themselves, they got closer to me."

"That so? So it turned out like that..."

Well, it's true the student council here is something special, but... at any rate, the president recruited all of us recently, so I wouldn't know how the council had acquired that kind of reputation yet.

"Well, I have the same impression you seem to have. Our joining into the student council was an extremely halfhearted course of events."

"That's true. It's not like we were voted in or anything."

"Well, whatever the reason, just being a member of the student council holds value. This proves that people trust the student council, right?"

Hmm.

Even if you say that, it's not quite the feeling I get. I pretty much get assigned nothing to do.

...Hm? Does that... wait. I'm a member of the student council too, so why the heck does Ginbei fit into her class while I'm stuck here as an outcast?

...

.....

.....

Yep.

Well, on second thought, I guess it's natural this would happen. After all, Ginbei is the treasurer, whereas I'm only the secretary's deputy assistant. Our ranks are on a completely different level. That's right, it's all because of the ranks. Communication abilities, popularity, all of them have nothing to do with this, yeah.

"By the way, Akito."

"Hm? What is it?"

"The fact that you're bringin' this topic up means that, in short, you couldn't fit in with your class yet, right?"

"Ah... Yeah, so you figured it out?"

"I did. We've been close friends for six years after all... So you really weren't able to fit in, huh?"

"Well, it's fine. Fortunately, I've got you. And Akiko, Nasuhara-san, and even prez too."

"Maybe they're just teasin' you?"

"No, not at all. They're not ignoring me, and no one's stolen my shoes from my locker either."

"Hm. But there has to be a reason, right? It's not like you're bad at socializin' either..."

Ginbei bent her head slightly to the side and pondered, but even with her quick-witted wisdom, it looked like she couldn't figure it out.

I already figured it out, but I had no intention of telling Ginbei. The answer was that I didn't have that many chances to interact with my classmates because the student council members, including Ginbei, kept on visiting me again and again, and this made it harder to close the distance between me and my classmates—or something like that. Nonetheless, I was happy that Ginbei had come to visit me.

No, but, what's wrong, I wonder?

Maybe they won't let me in anymore after I missed my first chances to socialize with them? It seems like I'm not going to have that many friends at this school too. And

add my job on top of that... Oh dear, I can only pray for my academy life not to go gray^[1].

"In any case, I can't just watch Akito's present situation without doin' anything after all. I know, I'll pitch in and help."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I'll help you fit in with your classmates."

"You? No, you don't need to do that much. I'll be fine even if you didn't..."

"No need to be reserved. It'd be cruel of me to not help a close friend who's in an unfavorable situation."

"It's fine, you don't need to worry that much. Time will fix that eventually. And weren't you the one who said my social skills aren't bad? I'll manage."

"Why are you bein' so stubborn?"

Ginbei inflated her cheeks a bit.

"I understand being unable to fit in is somewhat embarrassing. It's not like I haven't had similar experiences, and I'd do the same thing in your shoes. For this reason, I know that it won't fix itself over time. Akito, you should take this more seriously than you have up until now. And with my abilities, we should be able to break this deadlock."

"You're exaggerating — it's fine. It's not so bad that you need to wrack your brains worrying about it. I'll make sure to talk my classmates as much as I can. After that, it'll really be just a matter of time."

"It's a mystery, and an unpleasant one at that. I just want to help you. Why do you hate that idea so much?"

This is getting ugly, I thought.

Looks like Ginbei's trademark stubbornness has surfaced again. It won't be easy dealing with her now that she's like this.

"This is a serious problem, you know? It's a problem that deeply affects our friendship. Akito, you don't trust me, do you?"

"Impossible; of course I trust you."

"Really?"

"You don't believe me? Think about our relationship up until now. The answer is so obvious you shouldn't even have to think."

"Then let me help you."

"This and that are two different things."

"You're still sayin' such distant stuff? Are you keepin' a secret from me?"

"Now you're going on about me having secrets... I don't, it's different."

Well, that was a half-lie, but she didn't need to know.

In truth, even if it meant being permanently left out of my class, I welcomed visits from close friends like Ginbei.

"I'm always tellin' you this, but that's a bad habit, Akito."

"Bad habit? What is?"

"Doing anything and everything on your own and hidin' it from everyone else. Actually, you hurt me recently by doin' that, you know? How did you think I felt when I realized you had kept quiet about it and left me?"

"Ah... Yeah. That's true. Sorry."

"Hmph. It's too late to apologize for that now. Anyway, you'd better be sorry for makin' me go through that again. And if, by any chance, you try to keep secrets from me again, I'll make you spill the beans no matter what."

"I already said I'm not at all hiding anything... Or wait, did you say you forgave me about secretly transferring schools?!"

"Shaddap, you bonehead."

"Muu. I don't want to hear that from you."

"Hmph, what's wrong with callin' a bonehead a bonehead. I've yet to meet a man who's as stubborn as you. And while your personality certainly has its merits, the downsides outweigh them manyfold."

"That's what I should be saying. You're always like this. Everything would be fine if you just compromised a little, but that pathological stubbornness of yours always messes things up."

"It's fine, my stubbornness matches my boyish appearance. On the other hand, yours doesn't, and it's even worse because you look gentle. I wonder if you're trickin' others and making people cry."

"Aren't most of those false accusations? You're even bringing in looks. I guess anything goes when you want to meddle, huh?"

"I'm merely speakin' the truth. Tellin' me it's a false accusation *is* the false accusation. In the first place, Akito, as a man——"

She said.

With that, she abruptly stopped talking.

"Hm? What's wrong?"

"....."

As if the earlier silence wasn't enough, now Ginbei hung her head and curled herself up, her white cheeks turning red.

“...?”

I wondered what could be wrong, and the answer soon revealed itself.

We were at the academy’s park, where the student density was the highest. To make matters worse, it was break time, so numerous students were coming and going. In this kind of place, the two of us had surely become the center of attention before we knew it.

And on top of that...

[What’s that? Those two there. What are they arguing about?]

[Those two, you know, they’re the transfer students in the second year.]

[Hee? The two who suddenly entered the student council?]

[So what’re they arguing about? Is it a lover’s spat?]

[Really? Those two are going out?]

[That’s probably it. I’ve heard that she came here from Tokyo to chase after him.]

[Which means, it’s more of a matrimonial quarrel than a lover’s one?]

When I strained my ears, I could hear murmurs here and there.

“Ah~... seems like we’re standing out.”

“...It’s Akito’s fault...”

“No, don’t point: it makes it look like it’s your fault, right? Actually, it’s your fault, isn’t it?”

“That’s not true. You’re the cause of this quarrel, so it’s obviously your fault.”

“Really? You’re the one who got angry, right?”

Yare, yare.

We were just standing out, but now our argument was getting to be a public nuisance. In accordance with the rule ‘the nail that sticks out gets hammered in’ I wanted to spend time as quietly as possible, but... this had turned into a by no means perfect state of affairs.

“——Well, we won’t solve anything by pushing the blame on each other, I guess...”

“...Seems so. I agree with that point.”

While I accepted reality, Ginbei nodded in agreement, smiling wryly.

“We shouldn’t have been quarrelin’ like that in public. Let’s learn from that mistake.”

“That’s right, huh... People are also misunderstanding here... that’s how we pay for it.

It's both our fault. Well, they say that rumors only last 75 days, so it'll fade out, I guess."

"Yeah, guess so. I don't know if we really need to do something about that misunderstanding. I don't mind bein' treated like that, really..."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"N-Nah, it's nothin', alright? Forget I muttered anything."

"What did you say? I just told you that it's both of our responsibility, right? So properly explain it."

"No, I won't. It was just an out-of-character slip of tongue. Forget about it completely; erase it from your entire body and soul."

"Isn't that a bit too much? Aren't we good friends? You said it yourself just now, didn't you? That distance is bad."

"Why is it that you're only probin' deeper in these situations?! Anyways, I said I'm not goin' to tell you, so I won't. Therefore, this conversation is over."

"Oh no, I won't allow such selfishness. First of all, since it's you, Ginbei, I don't think you can complain. You were going on about me being secretive or something, but you're not better yourself. You often end conversations midway through at your own convenience, and I'm always left behind."

"This thickheaded guy sure is noisy. His indelicacy in such situations is always givin' me a hard time——"

And with that, Ginbei hung her head again, having realized more students had noticed us. To make matters worse, we were surrounded by my classmates' indifferent gazes. They were chuckling, and that cold sound seemed to leak from their expressions.

"...Akito. Thanks to you we've caused another misunderstanding."

"Oi, oi, me again? That's too much. No matter how you look at it, that earlier part was your fault. I'll admit some parts were my fault too, but one-sidedly blaming me is obviously unreasonable. That's just tyranny. Logically speaking, we both share the blame, right?"

".....EI!"

"UWA, THAT HU—?! Don't kick my shin!"

"You're so noisy, shut up. I don't wanna hear some logical reasonin'. I'll..."

"How am I supposed to respond if I can't reason with you?!"

"Aaah, enough! Anyways, this conversation is over. Classes are starting soon, so I'll be on my way."

Angered, Ginbei stood up and turned on her heels, one-sidedly ending the conversation.

“Wait, Gin.”

“What? I already said this conversation was over, right?”

“Thanks for the cookies. They were great. If you ever make them again, I certainly hope you’ll let me have some.”

“.....”

My good friend, who had been in the middle of a quick getaway, stood still on hearing those words.

“...I see. Thank you.”

“So you’ll make me some again?”

“Well, I’ll think about it *if* I get to make them again.”

“I see. Yeah, I’ll look forward to it.”

“And Akito?”

“Hm?”

Ginbei looked over her shoulder, pouting as she said:

“I admire your meticulous nature, yet I hate it.”

“Haha... Well, isn’t it better like this? It’d be emotionally hard on me if we let our relationship get awkward instead of making up quickly.”

“Hmph. You’re only honest at times like these. I am seriously displeased.”

As she teased me, my close friend stuck out her tongue and pulled down her eyelid. Then she darted away.

Yare, yare.

Well, I wonder if she’s cheered up for now?

Although she was generally a pretty detached person, she also had a sentimental side to her. That’s why I took care to apologize first whenever we fought. As long as I was open about things, she’d forgive me.

——And that’s all.

This was the kind of life I led at St. Liliana Academy.

No matter what happens, it looks like these *unique* student council members are going to play the lead role in my school life.

1. As opposed to the anime-ideal “rose-colored school life”. See Hyouka episode 1 right at the beginning for example.

May 4th, 1:00 P.M. (St. Liliana Academy - Student Dormitory)

Now then, today was a school holiday.

On this beautiful day, I had invited a certain someone to our dorm so I could keep my promise with Akiko.

“Waa. This brings back memories, doesn’t it~”

A woman had stopped at the gates and was looking up with glittering eyes at the two story building. Her name was Jinno Kaoruko-san.

She had a child-like face that didn’t match her age, a warm smile, and her trademark serious, drooping eyes. This was my editor.

“I thought it would be more worn out, but actually, it looks perfectly fine. It should hold up as a student dorm for quite a while.”

“No no, quite a few parts are showing their age, aren’t they? Well, I’ll have a contractor come over and fix some things here and there soon, so it’ll be much better.”

“Buildings immediately break down after people leave, don’t they~? Ah, by the way, Akito-kun, doesn’t your complexion seem a bit off? Maybe you’re not feeling well?”

“Hm, is that so? But no, nothing of the sort.”

“Really~? Then that’s good. As a professional author, it’s part of your job to manage your health. Please be properly aware of that... Ah, who’s that over there?”

“Yes, that’s my little sister... Hey, Akiko, come over here.”

My little sister came over to us when I called her. She had been standing in the doorway.

“...I’m Himenokouji Akiko. Pleased to meet you.”

“Jinno Kaoruko. Likewise, pleased to meet you.”

They introduced themselves to each other.

Unlike Jinno-san, who had introduced herself with a warm smile, Akiko was cautious, an obstinate expression bare on her face. They clasped each other’s hands; it seemed like they weren’t going to jump at each other’s throats.

Now let me explain how things got to this point.

Jinno-san had called our home a while ago, and Akiko was the one who answered.

↓

At the moment it seemed Jinno-san asked if Akiko and I had some sort of

inappropriate relationship.

↓

Akiko took offense to this, and demanded an explanation from me.

↓

Later, Jinno-san introduced herself. She had me promise to prove my innocence.

Part of it was to let her come by for a visit today.

“Well, I’m really sorry Jinno-san. It’s must be your precious day off, after all.”

“No no, it’s fine. This is perfect timing for me anyway. I was wondering ‘where to go, where to go?’ earlier, and if this opportunity hadn’t shown up I probably wouldn’t have had anything to do.”

“Ah, thank you. Being able to hear that puts me at ease... With that said, I’m curious about something you said earlier.”

“Yes?”

“When you were talking earlier, Jinno-san, it sounded to me as if you had some connection to this dormitory. Is that just my imagination?”

“No, it’s not your imagination~”

Jinno-san nodded, smiling calmly as always.

“I mean, I’m an alumna of St. Liliana Academy.”

“Eh? Is that so? This is the first time I’ve ever heard of it.”

“Really? Now that I think about it, I suppose I never mentioned it.”

“Jeez, please tell me stuff like that. After all, if you had we would’ve been able to talk about all kinds of things.”

“By the way, I lived in this dorm for three years.”

“Seriously?!”

If that was the case, then wouldn’t it have been better to tell me earlier?

Maybe she kept it secret so she could surprise me later, I wonder? No, I don’t feel like it’s that at all. Maybe she just forgot to mention it... No, I feel it’s not quite that either.

Yep. As always, I can’t understand her tempo.

“I was your partner for your previous work, and on top of that I’m your senpai from not only the same school, but the same dorm too. I’m going to enjoy relentlessly training you from now on, Akito-kun. I look forward to working with you.”

“Ah, thanks. I look forward to working with you as well.”

As Jinno-san bowed her head down to me, I also lowered my head to her. It was a bit odd of her to say something so gentle right after telling me she was going to train me relentlessly.

“Muu...”

That’s how my little sister reacted when she saw Jinno-san.

“He’s indebted to her at work, and she’s a senpai from both our school and this dormitory. Furthermore, she looks cute. With these conditions put together, this person is dangerous no matter how you look at it. She even seems incredibly kind... This is troubling...”

She seemed to be quite confused about various things.

“Um, Akiko-san.”

Jinno-san stepped forward.

“I’ve wanted to meet you for a long time now, and I’ve finally been able to fulfill this heartfelt desire of mine today. I’m very happy.”

“Ah, okay. Thanks.”

“And you know? After meeting you, there was something that I wanted to talk to you about no matter what.”

“What could that be?”

She asked.

Jinno-san took a deep breath and screamed:

“I truly think Akito-kun is a horrible person~!”

She shouted with all her might (her voice was only about 20 percent louder than normal though), and then abused me with all she had.

“Akito-kun is truly, truly horrible. Even if I ask him, ‘Please finish your work by today,’ he never finishes it at all. And even though he says things like, ‘Don’t worry, I’ll have it finished by that day without fail!’ while brimming with confidence, when the day comes, he won’t be finished after all. And then, when I check how he’s doing, he’ll only have done another page — no, not even that, he won’t have progressed even one bit since the previous time~!”

“O-Oh...”

“First of all, Akito-kun is still a complete newcomer — no, not even that, his *career* has just barely started — he still has to gain his customer’s trust, so this is a very, very important time for him. But even though I’ve told him this over and over again, he doesn’t listen to what I say. If only Akito-kun was brought up to be more reliable, I wouldn’t have to get scolded by the company president every time. What do you think about this?! Akiko-san~!”

“Ah, yes. Um, I think it is a very bad thing.”

Even though Jinno Kaoruko-san was angry, her words weren’t scary at all. True to her

reputation, even though Jinno-san was panting with rage, it wasn't menacing at all. But still, you could tell she was troubled from the bottom of her heart. Akiko seemed a little perplexed as she watched.

By the way, I wanted to keep my work (I'm a light novel author for now) a secret from my little sister. But with Jinno-san's mood now, she might carelessly let something slip (although she's only let about half of it slip so far).

Did she really have to let it all out now? I think unskillfully trying to stop an agitated woman would end up backfiring though...

"With that said, Akiko-san!"

"Y-Yes?"

"Please make your brother more reliable! If you don't, my company will take my head~!"

"O-Okay. I'll do my best."

"I beg of you! Turn Akito-kun into a serious, full fledged member of society. Anything is fine!"

"Anything?"

Sparkle

My sister's eyes lit up dangerously.

"Onii-chan has caused Jinno-san trouble, so to rehabilitate him into an honest man, you'll allow anything — is that what you're saying?"

"Yes!"

"So you don't care what it takes?"

"Exactly that!"

Oi oi, are you okay, Jinno-san? You're kind of forcefully handing me off to her with an 'anything goes' mentality. Don't be surprised when everything goes wrong if you speak rashly and she takes you up on your offer. Although... it seems she's at her wit's end; she can't see the consequences of her actions.

"I understand, leave it to me."

See, I told you so. Just like I said, no? Akiko is dangerously excited now.

"Since Onii-chan's superior begged me, there's no other choice. I, Himenokouji Akiko, humbly accept this mission."

"Wow, thank you! If Akiko-san lends me her power, our combined strength will be tremendous~!"

"Please rest easy and leave it all to me. I even have some ideas about rehabilitating Onii-chan already."

“Really?! What would that be?!”

“Yes. Namely, ‘Operation Kind-Onii-chan-who-is-all-over-his-little-sister-and-does-everything-she-says.’”

“...E-Excuse me?”

“The objective is simple: if Onii-chan falls in love with me even more, then he’ll do whatever I tell him — that’s all. As they say, ‘shimpuru izu besuto.’ The simpler things are, the better the results.”

“...??”

“From now on, I’m going to try all sorts of things to make Onii-chan fall in love with me, okay? I’ll give him goodmorning and goodnight kisses; I’ll exchange all sorts of affectionate expressions; I will thoroughly, without fail, enforce face-to-face skinship: hugging, sleeping together, holding hands, caressing heads — by giving him all of these rewards, Onii-chan will surely cherish me even more. Onii-chan and I will spend more time with each other. Of course, because we’re together day and night, I can easily see if Onii-chan is inconveniencing Jinno-san, right? This is, beyond any conceivable doubt, the most perfect plan... Wow, my own genius scares me...”

“Ah... Ehm...”

Akiko’s sudden outburst completely bewildered Jinno-san. Although, after that kind of first impression, it was probably only natural to react like that.

“So, will you leave the ‘Onii-chan Remodelling Plan’ to me, Jinno-san?”

“...Ehm, could I ask an awkward question?”

“Yes. What is it?”

“Could it be that Akiko-san is a hopeless bro-con?”

“Yes, absolutely!”

My little sister puffed up with pride and immediately replied.

“A brother complex is a distinguishing feature, you know! A gift from the gods! From the moment I was born until now, I’ve always been watching Onii-chan, and I’ll continue loving only Onii-chan forever more!”

“Ehm, in other words, you see Akito-kun as a man, or...?”

“Of course!”

“.....Auu~”

Jinno-san seemed embarrassed at Akiko, who didn’t look ashamed at all.

Yep. About now should be the right time.

“Come on, Akiko. Can’t you see that you’re troubling Jinno-san? This is already enough.”

“Ah. Yes, I’m sorry, Onii-chan. I got too passionate and was rude to our guest, who went to great lengths to visit us.”

“Yep, please be more careful from now on. So, do you understand now?”

“Excuse me? Understand what?”

“That Jinno-san and I don’t have a weird relationship. Wasn’t that why I asked Jinno-san to come over in the first place?”

“Ah, that’s certainly true! You showed me that Jinno-san is in the minority: a very good person!”

“I see. Then I’m glad .”

Seems like I wasn’t able to explain everything, but... well, it’s fine.

But rather than my sister, I’m more worried about our guest.

“Eeehm, sorry, Jinno-san, seems like we’ve been talking out here for a while. Please come on in for now. Akiko has prepared tea and sweets.”

“...The brother’s a sis-con, and the sister’s a bro-con... That’s not good... That’s not good at all... If I don’t do something...”

“Jinno-san?”

“AH, YES—?! What is it?!”

“It’s a little strange to be chatting out here. Please come in. We’d be happy to hear about your memories from this dorm and various other things.”

“Ah, yes. That’s right, isn’t it? Then please excuse me for imposing on your kindness.”

Jinno-san said. She flashed a smile, but her expression seemed stiff overall.

Her impression of me has suddenly hit rock bottom... Well, I’ll make sure to fix that shortly.



And, as I expected, Jinno-san gradually lightened up.

“Wooow! It didn’t change at all~!”

Jinno-san got ecstatic the moment she set foot into the dorm.

“Wow, this one’s still here~”

“Ah, but that one seems to be broken! How sad~”

“Ah, here, here! This crack! I crashed into that one, you know~ I got scolded harshly back then...”

In that kind of affectionate mood, she told us about her days as a student. The spontaneity of her mood changes and that she didn't let herself be affected for too long were Jinno-san's strong points.

Well, even if it wasn't her, this was a situation where tensions were rising. Legally speaking, this building was on the brink of being demolished. From Jinno-san's point of view, it must have felt as if she had lost her wallet and given up on looking for it, only for it to suddenly turn up out of nowhere.

With that feeling in mind, we had tea in the dining/conference room after a quick look around the dorm. Everyone was present since they had been informed beforehand.

"Mah, well met. As da student council president 'n a resident of this dorm I welcome da visit of mah senpai from da bottom of mah heart."

"You're quite the cute beauty, and I must say that you're wasted on Akkii."

"The strange and pretty ones always seemed to be drawn towards Akito... Well, be that as it may, I don't intend to be cold to a senpai who went of of her way to visit us. Let's give her the best hospitality we can offer."

Prez, Nasuhara-san, and Ginbei said.

It seems Jinno-san had made a good impression of each of them. Well, Jinno-san looked like the typical airhead/softhearted character at first glance, so she didn't leave a bad impression unless something major happened.

In any case, the tea party was progressing with a harmonious atmosphere. With the cheesecake Akiko baked and the spare Assam^[1] Ginbei took out, it was a tea party held with wonderful taste. There were even flowers. Also, Jinno-san's talk about this dorm's traditions and customs made for interesting conversation. To sum it up, we were having a good time.

Then, as we were about to break up for the day, Jinno-san, who had been smiling until then, suddenly looked nervous and started conversation again:

"Um, excuse me. Can I ask something~?"

After that preface she looked at her kouhai's faces and continued:

"Eeehm, there's something I'd like to ask about Akito-kun..."

"Hoho~ What about Himenokouji Akito?"

At times like these, the seniors took the lead — going by that, prez took the initiative and dealt with the request.

"For some reason ya lookin' gloomy or... how tah say... like ya can't help worryin'? Maybe this fellow here's guilty of somethin'? If so, then don't worry 'n tell me, it's mah duty as the student council president, after all."

"No, well, it's not that. Akito-kun didn't exactly do anything harmful, no..."

"No, no, Jinno-san, no need to keep talkin', I gotcha already. Jinno-san's a real beauty, so it ain't farfetched for Himenokouji Akito to lose control, aight?"

“Sure... Lose control, you say?”

“Anyone can imagin’ it, nay? Jinno-san bein’ a stunnin’ beauty, young men burstin’ with desires... combine those two and ya get one answer. Ain’t that it, Himenokouji Akito?”

“What’s ‘it’?”

I returned the president’s gaze with scornful eyes.

“Please don’t force your own values on everything. To begin with, Prez is the one bursting with desires here, not me, right?”

“Oi, oi. Ain’t good lyin’ to yourself, ya know? It’s rather impolite to not get horny in front of a beauty like Jinno-san, don’tcha think so? Actually, even I was burnin’ up the second I saw her, so... if the circumstances’d allow it, I’d already be conquerin’ her and about now we’d be done with having our pillow talk in mah bed. Ain’t that right, Jinno-san?”

“Eh? E-Ee-Eeehm, excuse me?”

“Calm down a bit, prez. Please do not ogle my precious coworker... I’m sorry, Jinno-san. Our president is that kind of person. Don’t mind it too much.”

“S-Sure...”

“Kakaka. That ain’t it, Jinno-san looked very tensed, ya know? So before I knew it I went outta mah way to loosen her up a bit with some blunt shockin’.”

“What blunt shocking? Wasn’t that just sexual harassment?”

“If ya think so, why don’t’cha try askin’ her? Ya can check whether she was uncomfortable or whether it went accordin’ to mah plan.”

“That kind of thing doesn’t need any asking. Loosening someone up with so coarsely couldn’t possibly——”

“Ah, I did loosen up, you know?”

Jinno-san nonchalantly replied, contrary to my expectations.

“I certainly was surprised, but it’s not like I felt uncomfortable. Well, the compliments weren’t elegant by any standard, and it felt rather mischievous. Nikaido-san is somewhat strange, isn’t she?”

“...See? Told ya.”

“You serious...?”

Jinno-san smiled, and our student council president was elated with her own success. My shock probably contributed to that too.

“Even though Nikaido-san is much younger than me, she’s reliable and calming. Isn’t she amazing? I think she’s well suited to be Liliana’s student council president.”

“You’re stackin’ the compliments, aren’t’cha? If yer alright with it, what’cha doin’

tonight? If you decide to be with a certain fancy student council prez, I'll love ya tenderly 'til the sun rises."

"Jeez, stop it. I don't swing that way~"

"Oops, mah bad, I'm bein' rude. But Jinno-san, everyone says that at first. If I just give up with that, I'd be all out of girls. I'll make mah move some other day. Please prepare yerself."

"Ara, ara. Nothing will come out of making a move on this old lady, you know~?"

...Hm.

It certainly doesn't seem like Jinno-san hates it, or rather, it looks like she might even be enjoying this stupid exchange. Although, that's probably only because prez is skilled at carrying those kind of conversations, and not because Jinno-san was innately interested in that sort of thing.

I get it. It must be something like an advanced playboy's technique. Although she's joking around, she doesn't make her target uncomfortable. Her techniques that of a a first-class host.

"So, what did'cha want earlier? Ya had somethin' ya wanted to say, aight?"

"Ah, right, right, that's it, something like that. Eehm, you see..."

Jinno-san cleared her throat with a cough and strained her shoulders again.

Now... what on Earth's is she going to say? A topic Jinno-san hadn't mentioned until now... There wasn't any reason to talk about work here, so it was probably something private, but what would she talk about in this kind of situation? I have no id—

"Ehm, I've got a question for all of you."

Jinno-san's eyes filled with resolve, and then she said:

"Don't you think that Akito-kun is a huge siscon—?"

...

.....

.....

Silence filled the room for a bit — a difficult atmosphere. Then the prez opened her mouth:

"Right when I was wonderin' what you were gonna drop... Ya don't need to say somethin' like that, Jinno-san. You might as well question da first law of thermodynamics if yer gonna ask if Himenokouji Akito = siscon — they're both one of

the world's principles.”



“Well, that’s obvious, isn’t it?”

Nasuhara-san voiced her consent.

“He’s completely oblivious to things that aren’t little sisters. If there’s a sick sister in the east, he’ll go nurse her, and if there’s a worn-out sister in the west, he’ll go carry her luggage. Which brings us to the result that little sisters are center of his world, right?”

“Rather than a siscon, you could say he’s got OSD.”

Even Ginbei nodded in agreement.

“For him, this world is divided into two categories, namely little sisters and not little sisters. He makes every decision through the lens of that black and white dualism, and, well, I guess that’s quite a simple way to live.”

Hm?

Wha-what?

I’m somehow getting the feeling I’m being dissed sharply and outrageously, no?

“So i-it really is like that, right—?! It really is, right—?!”

On the other hand, Jinno-san made a ‘That’s exactly how I feel’ kind of face:

“Of course, I don’t have anything against viewing one’s little sister as something precious. In fact, I think it’s wonderful if siblings can get along. Yet, I don’t know about the details, but in Akito-kun’s case his being a siscon is even showing in his job, although it is a rather good thing during work, but anyway, Akito-kun is a real earth-shattering siscon, and he’s about to cross a somewhat dangerous line, right—?!”

“Ah, yeah, that’s right. Completely mah thinkin’.”

“That’s right, isn’t it? As expected, everyone has the same impression, right?”

“Yeah. That person’s tastes are really a problem.”

...Hm, somehow these people seem to have reached a mutual understanding. It feels like these are people who couldn’t say ‘The king has donkey ears’^[2] even if they wanted to, but now all of them loosened up at the same time and started getting talkative...

Well, but certainly...

Whatever I say, it wouldn’t change the ‘official opinion’ on me, but...

“Hahaha. What is everyone saying? I’m not a siscon at all, you know? You guys are all so silly...”

“...I can only admire yer thick hide.”

While the prez was astonished by my reaction...

“How ’bout ya accept it already? Lookin’ at it from society’s point of view, ya can only be seen as the dreadnought among siscons, ya know?”

“No, no. Obviously I do view my little sister as something precious, okay? We’re

siblings, and she's my only family in the world."

"We do understand that it's natural to value one's own family."

Now it was Nasuhara-san's cold eyes...

"However, constraints exist in our society for certain degrees of indecency, do they not? And no matter how anyone looks at it, Akkii, you break them all. You and others unfamiliar with your personality may not be aware of this, but your life consists of completely disregarding everything that is not your little sister. As people living under the same roof, from our point of view, this is indisputably clear."

"No, no. Saying that I disregard everything else is going too far, right? Plus, I'm not as lenient towards Akiko as you suggest. Rather, I thought that I was treating her pretty strictly? Just recently, I agreed that Akiko and I would stay in separate rooms too even though it was so sudden. I was pretty proud of myself. And I saw it through even though Akiko was throwing a tantrum."

"That's true, if we're lookin' at your behavior on a superficial level, that is."

And it was Ginbei's time to strike.

"The fact that we know, or going by the *phenomena* we were able to observe, is that Akito is at best a normal sister-loving brother. Even factorin' in that you and Akiko-kun were separated for six long years, well, we can't say your behavior can be explained as just being familial affection. No matter how much you gloss over it on the outside, you can't deceive us that easily. So, Akito, as people who are close to you, from our point of view the only thing we're unsure about is how low your siscon-ism has fallen."

"See?! See, see~?!"

After having one after the other back her up, Jinno-san had a triumphant expression.

"Isn't that right? Everyone's saying that, right? It's like that after all, Akito-kun. You're a siscon. Admit it already and come back onto the right path~ Okay—? Okay—?"

As she tried to get me to confess, Jinno-san turned her childish face, which wasn't awe-inspiring at all, into the most majestic expression she could make. It was a pity, but it didn't make much of an impression on me.

But on second thought, she really was a good person. She could have easily proven I was a sis-con by revealing *those* things: the photo of my sister I had laminated and stored, or that I wrote in my 'sister diary' every day.

Since the beginning, I had thought Jinno-san was a trustworthy person who could keep secrets, and indeed, she was as silent as a graveyard, also never letting anything slip. I was honestly happy.

I was happy and unexpectedly thankful that she was worrying about me, the author in charge of this or that. I was lucky to have Jinno-san as my editor.

Also, although they might all have shown it in their own way, the student council members were worried about me as colleagues, and for that I was grateful. Thanks to them, this time I was much more successful in my school life.

...But... This and that are different matters entirely.

Well then, let's end this pointless argument.

"Alright, everyone, then let's do this..."

"What'cha schemin'?"

"It's simple. Why don't we just ask the person in question?"

I said as I turned my word to my little sister, who hadn't had the chance to interject yet.

"Oooi, Akiko. What do you think?"

"What *could* I think?"

My sister made a blank face and continued:

"I don't think Onii-chan is a siscon at all?"

"EEEEH—?!"

Jinno-san was the first to react.

"W-What's that?! Even though Akito-kun's like *that*, Akiko-san herself's denying it?! Eehm... EEH—?!"

"Y-You don't have to be that surprised..."

Even though Akito was confused by Jinno-san's intense reaction, Akiko explained:

"Onii-chan certainly sees me as someone precious to him, but it's as siblings, nothing more.

"T-That's not——"

"Or rather, if there was something more, I'd be bursting with delight. But in reality I struggle every day trying to turn Onii-chan into a siscon, so you couldn't be further from the truth."

"That's probably right, but——"

"Or rather..."

My sister put her hands on her hips and said:

"For the sake of argument, let's say that Onii-chan was really such an outrageous siscon, that I was the target of his romantic interest, and that I was aware of this situation. If that really were the case, then there's no way I would chase Onii-chan with as much restraint as I do now, right?"

"...Ah."

Jinno-san became speechless and Akiko shrugged, continuing:

"Onii-chan will draw back if I come on too strong. I bear with the current level exactly

because I understand this. But Onii-chan is a siscon and sees me as a potential love interest, huh? It really does sound like a dream. If that were true... I'd drop out of school immediately and look for a place where we could live by ourselves. I'd also hide the fact that we're siblings from the people in the area. Then we could spend the rest of our lives as a happily married couple. Haa, that would be so wonderful... Well, that's all assuming Onii-chan is a siscon though."

On seeing Akiko, who was talking with the blissful expression of a dreaming maiden, the other student council members wordlessly exchanged glances. It looked like they didn't know what to say anymore.

Yep, looks like the match is over.

"And Onii-chan..."

"Hm? What is it, Akiko?"

"Could Onii-chan really be a siscon, see me as a woman, and all those other things?"

"Nope. Not at all."

"Haa... I figured as much. It's really just that, isn't it? I knew it, I really did, but everyone was saying those things, so..."

"By the way, everyone's saying stuff like I disregard anyone who's not my little sister or that I'm about to cross a dangerous line, but what do you think, Akiko?"

"Do you even need to ask what I'm thinking? It's not true at all. Not only is Onii-chan as cold as ice when I approach him, he talks to other women too... Onii-chan can't be called a proper siscon like that. He needs to put a little more effort into becoming a siscon."

"Yep, sorry. Not happening."

"Please disregard anyone other than me and steadily cross that dangerous line."

"Yep, sorry. Not happening."

"Boo... Onii-chan, meanie..."

"Well, it's nothing to be dejected over, right? It doesn't change that I love you the most in the world... As a sister."

"Uuuuh~... I'm happy to hear that, of course, but in the end I want Onii-chan to see me as a love interest!"

"Right, right. Not happening, absolutely not."

"Then it's fine not to see me as a love interest. Please marry me instead!"

"That hurdle is even higher than being your love interest."

"Then it's fine not to marry me. Now, please accompany me to the regional legal affairs bureau, stamp the official family register documents with your Hanko, and submit them!"

“That procedure would lead to marriage, right? I refuse.”

“Then vow your eternal love to me in front of God!”

“Please give up already.”

“I understand. In that case...”

“Kissing, hugging, and patting your head are also a no.”

“Mukii! Onii-chan is cruel for predicting my requests and crushing them all! As punishment, please sneak into my bed tonight!”

“Yep, got it. Let’s do that.”

“Eh?”

“I’ll take a nap, eat plenty of food that gives stamina, and drink nutritious drinks. And after I’ve flawlessly prepared myself, I’ll sneak into Akiko’s room. I won’t let you sleep tonight, okay?”

“Eh, I — but, um, so suddenly, I don’t know if my heart’s ready for this. Of course I’ve always been ready and on stand-by for that, but if it’s so sudden, I don’t know if this troubles me, or am I not troubled?”

“If you’d prefer, instead of waiting until night time, how about we do it right now?”

“EEEEEH—?! T-That’s... suddenly so proactive... Um, but it’s my first time and I don’t know if I can take an intense Onii-chan... Aaah, what should I do? I don’t know what to do now that it’s happening for real. Do I have time to look things up real quick...? Ah, excuse me, I’m going to take a shower before it! I’ve got that much time, right?!”

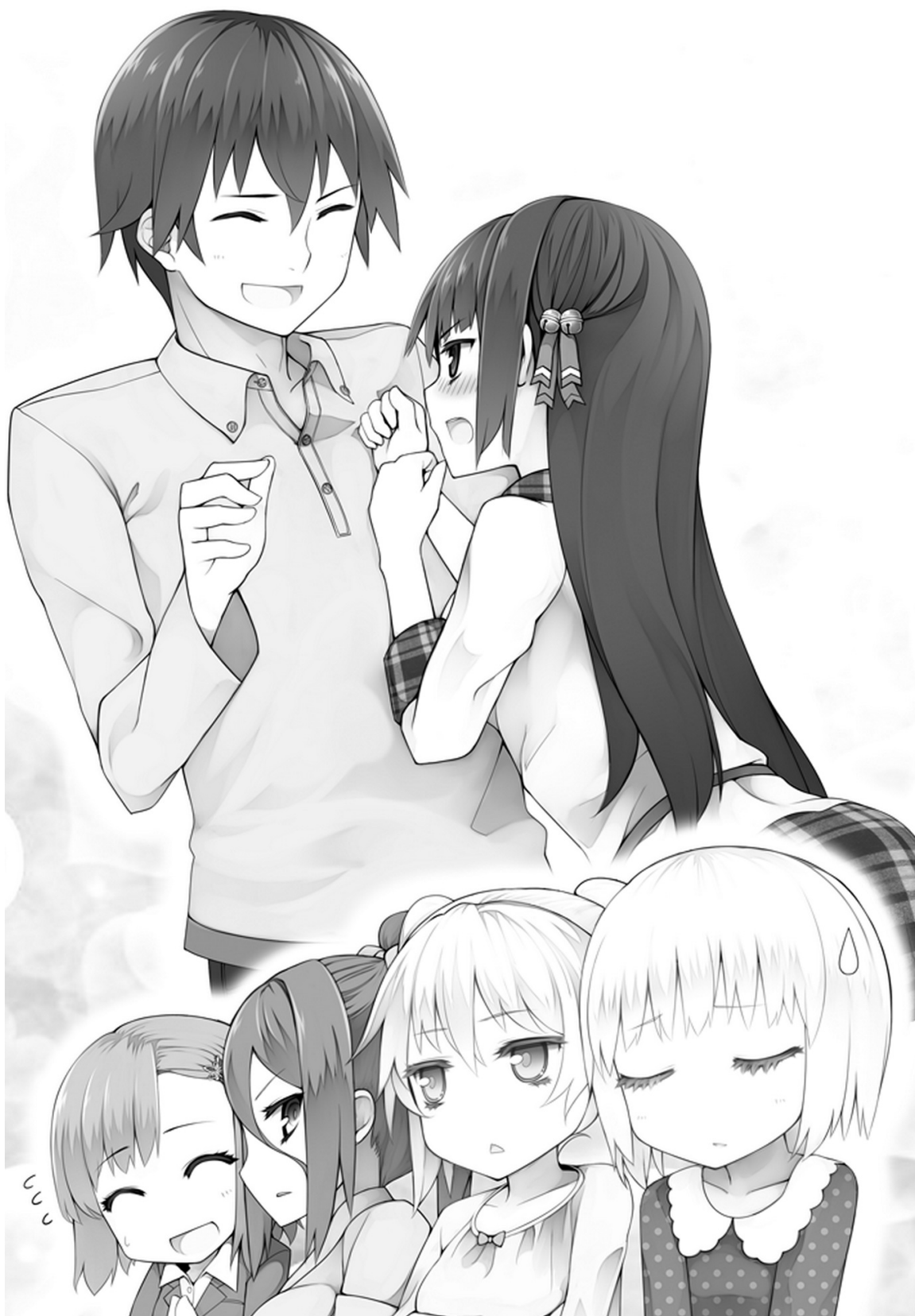
“Hahaha. You’re as cute as ever, aren’t you?”

“Muu—?! From how you said it, were you leading me on?!”

“Ahaha. Kinda. Hahaha.”

“GODDAMN^[3]! Mercilessly toying with a maiden’s heart! Onii-chan’s a cruel person! Cruel, I say!”

“Hahaha.”



...Well, something like that.

Having dealt with my sister, who was now punching my chest repeatedly, this case came to a close.

From the corner of my eyes, I could see Jinno-san, prez, Nasuhara-san, and Ginbei sighing deeply. I pretended not to see it.

‘No matter how ya look at them, they’re like love birds...’

‘I suppose the two of them fall under the classification ‘even Kusatsu’s water can’t heal them^[4]’...’

‘Givin’ up is the only thing left...’

Or so I heard, but I pretended not to notice it again.

My sister and I were in harmony. This included the surrounding people too, of course.

Yep, looking at it that way is best.

Notes

1. Tea. See [here](#).
2. Refers to a parable about a barber who was imprisoned after he revealed the king's secret donkey ears. He had unintentionally done so by shouting the secret into a deep, dark hole. Read more on this nicely designed page [here](#).
3. In English.
4. *Kusatsu hot spring*: The locals claim the hot springs can cure all forms of ailments except love sickness.

May 9th, 7:30 P.M. (Student Dormitory · Dining/Conference Room)

Well then, please let me introduce the tasks that I, the dorm manager, deal with every day.

Example number one:

“Onii-chan, Onii-chan. Do you have a moment?”

“Hm? What is it?”

“The fluorescent lightbulb in my room is flickering, and it looks like it might go out soon. Would you mind replacing it?”

“I see, got it. Just tell me the size, and I’ll buy one with our dorm budget later. Let me know by tomorrow or so.”

“Thank you very much. By the way, I assume Onii-chan will be the one replacing it?”

“Hm? It’s not something you can’t do by yourself, right? The ceiling’s not that high here, and you could always use the ladder in the storehouse.”

“That might be true, but, you know, I think it’s something a man should do. Besides, Onii-chan is taller than I.”

“That’s true, but...”

“And most importantly, I want to confirm with my own eyes that Onii-chan is a man I can rely on. I was thinking it’d be nice if I saw Onii-chan changing the lightbulb like it was nothing and then flashing his white, sparkling teeth. That way I could think ‘Onii-chan’s so cool!’ ”

“I wonder if changing a lightbulb would turn into that kinda thing... Well, it’s alright, I got it. I’ll do it.”

“Yaaay! Thank you very much!”

“By the way, let me get something straight. You’re not planning to do something when I’m about to step on the ladder, are you? Like shaking the ladder, then jumping on and raping me the second I fall off?”

“Ahaha, how could I~ Of course not~”

“Really?”

“Of course. That’s dangerous. What if Onii-chan fell from someplace high and something happened by chance? I wouldn’t be able to bear it.”

“I see. Well, that’s true.”

“To me, anything involving Onii-chan is top priority. Onii-chan’s the most important thing in the world to me, so I would never do anything to harm him. It would really make me sad if Onii-chan doesn’t trust me on this...”

“Yeah, I understand. No, I mean, I’m sorry I doubted you. On second thought, you’re right. Of course you wouldn’t do something like that.”

“Yes. I wouldn’t. I thought about it, you see. I’d spread something slippery over my floor, tempt Onii-chan into walking on it, and push Onii-chan down the second he falls over — or so goes the plan. Unlike with falling from a step ladder, with this plan there’s little chance for Onii-chan to get hurt. And to complete the security measures, I also intend to spread out the softest carpet I can find on the ground. What does Onii-chan think? Haven’t I taken care of every detail? Exactly because I love Onii-chan, he should have a generous heart and fall into this potential and gentle trap of mine as _____”

“I’ll see if I can buy a bulb tomorrow and put it in front of your room. Then you can switch it out yourself.”

“Th— P-Please wait, Onii-chan! I was just joking, a joke! I swear I’m only going to push you down, so change the lightbulb in my room! Pleeeeease!”



Example number two:

“Akkii. Do you have a moment?”

“Hm? What is it?”

“It’s about something that happened this evening. A suspicious door-to-door salesman forcefully pitching deals I understand little of came again.”

“Eh? Again? There have been many of them lately, huh?”

“It surely is that time of the year. There are many inexperienced people who just started living on their own, right?”

“Ah, I get it. That’s true, huh?”

“And so, this salesman offered me his advice, and I bought this vacuum cleaner.”

“Eh?! You bought something?!”

“Yes. This vacuum cleaner.”

“Uwa, it looks just an ordinary one at first glance... So, how much did you pay?”

“About 1,000,000 Yen.”

“TOO MUCH! NO MATTER HOW YOU LOOK AT IT, HE RIPPED YOU OFF?!”

“I was told that the location or the user’s skill level were irrelevant: anyone could use

this cleaner. All you need to do is turn on this switch, and it will effortlessly clean the floor, scrub the windows, mow the garden, and wash the dishes all by itself.”

“Normally you wouldn’t be able to buy a cleaner with those specs for that price. Or wait, that kind of cleaner doesn’t exist to begin with! Use your common sense, use it!”

“My family’s corporation was developing such a cleaner.”

“Yeah, Nasuhara Corporation, right? Anyway, wouldn’t that be more of an all-purpose maid robot or something, not a vacuum cleaner?”

“Hmm, is that so? I can say with reasonable certainty that we successfully made one. We’ve had a working prototype at my house since quite a while ago.”

“Seriously...? Your company’s doing a good job, huh? But still, normally something so convenient couldn’t be on sale. Not to mention the shady salesman. Jeez, you’re really oblivious, aren’t you?”

“You might say that, Akkii, but it’s your fault too..”

“Me? How so?”

“You don’t remember? I have told you that I’m a woman who’s completely useless at chores and cleaning. You said you’d make sure to look properly after and accommodate me as much as you could until I became useful.”

“Aah... Well, I *did* say that, but...”

“However, you’ve been busy, so you couldn’t teach me anything. Therefore, to mature by myself, if only just a little, I bought this cleaner from the shady salesman.”

“I’m getting the feeling that you’re trying to blame me...”

“You lied when you vowed to take care of me your whole life, didn’t you?”

“I didn’t say that. I said I’d take care of you, and the context was your lack of common sense, right?”

“You were only after my body.”

“Did I ever request something like that? Even once?”

“Anyway, I successfully spent a fortune on an ordinary vacuum cleaner. Should I throw it in the oversized trash, I wonder?”

“No no, even if we rarely use it, don’t you think it’d be a shame to throw it out? Rather, please just return it. You’ll get your money back too.”

“Even if you tell me to give it back, I don’t know how.”

“...Okay, got it. I’ll do it. What’s his contact information.”



Example number three.

“Akito. Got a sec?”

“Hm? What is it?”

“Usin’ the kitchen for a while got me thinkin’. This building’s 70 years old, and the plumbing and gas lines are gettin’ old. There’s nothin’ we can’t use right now, but it’d probably be better to discuss a full renovation.”

“Hmm, I see. It’s no good after all, huh...”

“I think I’ll be fine if I’m usin’ every trick in the book, but I don’t know if there won’t be some kind of accident eventually.”

“I guess so. A gas accident would be especially dangerous.”

“An earthquake would be problematic too. The dorm’s current condition is amazing for something 70 years old, but...”

“Yeah, true. It’s been a while since people lived here, and surely there’s damage here and there. This house was originally going to be demolished, after all.”

“Hm. I checked our dorm’s foundation. Even by older safety standards, it’s not in the best condition.”

“I see. It does seem like the foundation won’t support it.”

“Did the board of directors give you permission to renovate the dorm?”

“Well, yeah. They did.”

“To be more specific then, how are things progressing?”

“Yeah, well... I haven’t really...”

“Have you decided on a contractor yet? What’s the budget? What about the places gettin’ renovated? How long will it take?”

“Yeah, um, sorry, that’s still not...”

“You’re the manager here. Get your act together.”

“Even if you say that, I’m pretty busy myself...”

“So am I. I’m makin’ food for all of you every day, diligently attendin’ classes, and working in the student council — I have other things too. And I can’t split myself up, you know?”

“I won’t argue against that. Actually, that kind of thing should be Prez’ job to begin with. How did it end up being my job now...”

“However easygoin’ she may look, Isn’t it obvious that the she’s much busier than you? Nikaidou Arashi is undoubtedly a dictator, so she has to shoulder many duties by herself. I’ve noticed her dealin’ with many issues inside the academy, and I’ve seen her runnin’ around many times over. And yet, her calm demeanor in spite of all that is quite

admirable.”

“That might be true, but...”

“Akito, it’s that bad habit of yours. You’re furiously vigorous in critical situations, but otherwise you’re lazier than a cat that’s nappin’ while holdin’ its stuffed tummy. You’ve given me a hard time many times over because of it. I want you to remember that.”

“Ugh. Sorry, sorry. I’ll be more careful next time.”

“I feel no sincerity in your words. Men like you are always like that: postponing bothersome things, lettin’ them all pile up, and in the end, not finishin’ any of them. I’ve seen it happen many times, and even you should be aware of it by now. And if you’re aware of it, improve yourself.”

“...There it is again, Ginbei’s preaching... Are you my mom or what? Jesus...”

“Akito. Did you say something?”

“Nope, nothing at all. Anyway, I get what you’re saying. I feel the same. We should deal with these renovations as soon as we can. I’ll do my best to keep you updated about my progress. Is that alright with you?”



“——There’s so much work... or so? Don’t’cha talk so miserably.”

She shook her head exaggeratedly, heaving a sigh for show. That was Prez’ reaction when she overheard me complaining.

“Well, fo’ real, yer work load ain’t a joke, eh? But ya know that I ain’t assignin’ work to someone who can’t do it, don’t’cha? I examined ‘n left that to ya, but seems I got’cha wrong, eh?”

“Right... thanks. Sorry.”

“Stop sayin’ such miserable things, oi.”

Seeing me scratch my head, Prez made sure to look up at the sky and shrug.

“He certainly is miserable.”

Nasuhara-san agreed, chewing on some Mizuna no ohitashi^[1].

By the way, right now we were gathered in the student dorm’s dining/conference room. As always, we were chatting while eating dinner.

“Akki’s workload is hardly remarkable when compared to that of the other student council members. I can’t see any reason to complain.”

“No no, you might say that, but I have problems here too, you know? I have to handle most of the dorm chores.”

“That’s not unexpected when you’re the dorm manager.”

“On top of that, I have to handle some of the student council’s work too...”

“You have it easy if those are your only obligations. Also, Prez attends to many errands which are, technically speaking, your duty.”

“That might be true, but in my case, I’m also the Himenokouji family’s backbone. I’m earning all of the money we spend.”

“As am I involved in multiple division tasks in the Nasuhara Corporation. Soon I’ll take over management of the company, so this acts as a rehearsal.”

Muu, is that so? We were just chatting casually, so I nearly forgot that these people were unbelievable.

“No, but... it’s also a student’s duty to study. If I have too many duties and spread myself all over the place, I wonder if my grades won’t just drop into a black hole...”

“Not to boast, but I’ve maintained top rankings in grades. Nevertheless, I spend about as much time on studying as Akki.”

“No, well, hm...”

“By the way, I also plan to earn some university credits this year.”

“Eh? Is that so?”

“Yes. Liliana already perfected the so-called skip-a-grade system, so this isn’t anything new.”

She said it casually, but isn’t that amazing?

I’ve never seen her making a lot of effort, but seemingly she does what has to be done, alright. Hm, as expected of someone who consistently places at the top of an elite school.

But I didn’t want her telling me that, especially when she was completely useless at cleaning and cooking! Even if studying was our main duty, there still are many other important things people need to do!

“I, too, agree with Nasuhara-kun.”

Straight away, Ginbei opened her mouth.

Not only were her abilities on par with other student council members, but Ginbei’s capabilities also encompassed a wide breadth that even extended to household chores.

“We recognize that you’re busy with work and that we gave you chores in the dorm. However, you should still have spare time left, no?”

“No no, that’s not the case, my hands are already full. For me, classes are tough, and so is managing the dorm.”

Incidentally, I still felt out of place in class.

"I'm already reaching a breaking point. I'm about to hit my limit, and if this keeps up, I'll collapse."

"We've been acquainted for a while. You are gravely mistaken if you think you can deceive me with that pitiful excuse."

"It's not an excuse. I'm only sleeping three or four hours a day, you know?"

"None of us are exempted from that. Everyone is busy, they make their own time, and they spend their days plenty productively, no?"

"That might be true, but——"

It certainly was a sound argument, but it didn't change that I felt discouraged.

Getting up at five o'clock in the morning, doing work, seriously attending most of my classes, and then working for a student council that's swamped in obligations — and while I'm dealing with my student council colleagues' heckling, it becomes evening, when I have another set of responsibilities.

I should be commended for my dedication, but instead these elite school girls only complain.

"Just look at your little sister."

Ignoring me as I pouted, Ginbei continued the tirade.

"She's really givin' it her all, you know? Aside from cookin', she does far more chores than I, and her grades are higher than mine too, although she's not on Nasuhara-san's impossible level. I know this firsthand as I'm spendin' a lot of time with her 'cause of our duties."

"That's, well, Akiko is a talented little sister——"

"Again with the excuses. A real man would get his act together after hearing that."

"No, well, I get what you're saying, but——"

"Akiko-kun. What do you think?"

Maybe because the conversation wasn't getting anywhere, Ginbei brought up Akiko.

"Don't you feel something when you see your older brother like this? Don't you want Akito to get it together too?"

"Eh—? Um..."

Replied my sister with a blank stare. She was carrying cooked spear squid and taro to her small mouth.

"Um, I think Onii-chan is already amazing as he is."

"How so?"

“Um, because even though he’s still a student, Onii-chan’s holding a job and supporting me with his income.”

“That’s only natural. He’s the one who wanted to live with you without relyin’ on anyone else, after all.”

“Not only that, Onii-chan’s also helped us out as the student dorm manager.”

“From what I heard, this dorm was set for demolition, and it was stipulated for Akito to assume full responsibility of its management if he wanted to use it. I’ve heard that Akito had been assigned a clause which has him to take over all the responsibilities of the dorm management so that he could use the dorm which was set up for demolition. In other words, Akito’s only doin’ this because he burdened himself of his own volition. It’s only natural, so I wonder if it’s praiseworthy.”

“But, but! Onii-chan is my unshakeable ally when he needs to be!”

“That’s unrelated to how amazing he is.”

“Ah, and Onii-chan’s good-looking.”

“Sounds more like your personal opinion.”

“It’s futile, Gingin. Regardless of how you might reason with her...”

While putting her spoon into her green tea pudding clad in sugar sauce, Nasuhara-san said:

“Himenokouji-san is perfect evidence that ‘love is blind.’ She finds a turtle prettier than the moon, and glass marble more beautiful than a diamond. It’s impossible for her to evaluate Akito’s value as a human being.”

“T-That’s not true! Onii-chan is plenty amazing! I can guarantee that as his little sister!”

“Then let us hear it. What makes your Onii-san so amazing?”

“Um, for example, Onii-chan is pretty good at studying!”

“Of course, although on our recent test I heard you’d find him faster from the bottom.”

“Actually, Onii-chan is an amazing cook!”

“Better than you or Gingin?”

“He’s really manly when time calls for it!”

“I think someone who’s consistently helpful is more amazing than a man who’s only helpful when the time calls for it.”

“And Onii-chan is unexpectedly popular!”

“Well, I wouldn’t call him unattractive, but it’s not enough to let him survive in society with that alone.”

“Um, right... Onii-chan is very kind!”

"Hypothetically speaking, I wonder how worthless and pathetic a man would be if kindness were to be his only virtue. At the very least, you couldn't call him amazing."

"No matter how much I try to seduce him, he doesn't catch on. I think that's amazing!"

"Rather, in society today it's common sense not to 'catch on' if your blood-related sister tried to seduce you."

That was the exchange between my sister, who gave example after example of my strong points, and Nasuhara-san, who crushed each example without mercy.

Yep. My sister was in trouble. I couldn't find any strong points from my point of view either.

"Uuuu~ ...You're just arguing against everything I say without giving me a chance to explain! It's unjust!"

"It couldn't be helped. You provided not a single example of unquestionable merit. If you intend to refute me, provide an example so wonderful, so amazing, that we cannot be but speechless, unable to speak a word in dissent."

"Uuuuu~!"

My sister was gnawing at her lips and groaning in frustration, but then...

"Onii-chan! Onii-chan—!"

"Hm? What is it?"

"Look at what Nasuhara-san said! Doesn't it frustrate you?!"

"No, well, you know: her words were reasonable, I guess."

"Please show them something right now that will prove Onii-chan is amazing!"

"Nope, sorry. To be honest, I probably don't have any special appeal."

"That's impossible! Onii-chan won't lose to anyone, Onii-chan has some special super power hidden away!"

"You see... I shouldn't have those kind of powers."

"Please think about it! There has to be something! Please show the entire world how heart-stoppingly amazing you are!"

"Hmm, is that so... I know some card tricks?"

"That's too low on the scale!"

"Then how about this: I can open my nostrils without using my fingers."

"Please distance yourself from those gags!"

My sister was at her wits' end, but it couldn't be helped. It was a pity, but Himenokouji Akito wasn't that amazing. Rather, I was almost sorry that I joined the student council with these other amazing people as members.

“Jeez, don’t be so sloven.”

This time Prez opened her mouth.

“Himenokouji Akito, I was the one who dragged ya into the council. In other words, yer workin’ style was already contained in my evaluation. Ya know that, don’t’cha?”

“Well, that might be true, but...”

She was right, but for someone like me, who’d been forcibly dragged, it was still a matter that couldn’t just be nodded off.

“Although I know that yer burden ain’t easy...”

Before I knew it, Prez made a U-turn and softened her attitude...

“There are at most five people livin’ in this dorm, so ya shouldn’t have much to do. But it’s true that ya have many problems despite this. Anyone taking a closer look would immediately realize yer doin’ a fine job.”

“Yes yes. Isn’t that right? Isn’t it?”

“I heard there used to be a full time manager here. Fer the most part, Himenokouji Akito’s doin’ everything that manager did back then.”

Quite right. Jinno-san had been surprised too when she visited, but legally speaking this dorm should have a proper manager.

In fact, the 2LDK I’m using right now had been furnished for the manager. It had a much grander appearance than the rooms the other student council members had. I was ready to give up my room at any time if a new manager took on the job.

“Which leads us to this: we’re lookin’ for a student dorm manager now.”

Prez made a pretty serious proposal.

“I thought about talking with ya’ll after we finished up the other talk. Soon, someone the board of directors approved will start working as our dorm manager.”

“What to say... It’s still pretty sudden...”

“This discussion had been there from the start. Well, we donno what kinda person it’s gonna be yet, but to make that person turn out as capable as possible, the board of directors ‘n I are ‘bout to discuss the matter.”

Hm, even if she said that, Prez properly did what had to be done. It was great news for me since I was struggling through the everyday chores.

“So, this is also a good opportunity. I was thinkin’ ’bout askin’ you guys what kinda manager you’d want. So?”

“Surveying? You mean what kind of manager we’d like?”

“Aye. Might as well get someone who’s capable of meetin’ yer demands, aight? Well, how far that person can comply is tricky though.”

"If that's the case, then I'd like to ask you refrain from employing a man if possible."

Akiko was the first one to raise her hand.

"I've heard this was originally a girl's dorm, and even now most of its occupants are girls. So I'd think some people would oppose having another male here..."

"Hm. In my case, having a male manager wouldn't be a problem at all."

"That's because Onii-chan is a man. We are girls, so it'd really be a bit... I think."

"Well, I get it."

I certainly did get what she was saying. Although, it was more of a problem that I was pretty much living in a women's dorm. I probably shouldn't meddle with the board of directors' decision.

Or rather, my original 'live alone with my little sister' goal already crumbled, so I get the feeling I should reconsider our living environment from the root up.

"Hmmm... I think it's more shameful that I'm the only man here with four girls. Also, a male manager would be more reliable. It's an old building, so it's less secure. If push comes to shove, having more men around would be better. For example, if a thief or a molester came..."

"It's fine. I'm fairly good with aikido and our president is a first class swordsman. Nasuhara-san and Ginbei-san are also capable, one way or another. Any thief or molester that tried to break in would quickly meet his end."

"Oh yeah, that might be true..."

"And if we're only talking about me, I'd warmly welcome Onii-chan stealing my underwear. Please come stealing them at any time, okay?"

"Wait. How did it shift to this kinda talk?"

"To make sure it's easier for Onii-chan, I always put the especially valuable underwear in places where it's easy to find."

"I didn't ask for that intel."

"And to make it so Onii-chan can molest me at any time, I always pay close attention in selecting what underwear I wear."

"Let's pay more attention to other things, okay?"

"What are you saying? For Onii-chan to see me, I'm diligently choosing my underwear. There wouldn't be any point if you didn't see them, now would there? It's Onii-chan's fault that I'm not blessed with good chances. Please consider the feelings of my pitiable lucky underwear."

"Got it, I got it already. Anyway, you don't want a male manager, right? Understood, let's inform the board of directors through Prez."

I wouldn't have known for how long the underwear talk would have gone on if I went

with it, so I decided to forcefully end it by picking up our original topic.

“Eeehm, then how about Nasuhara-san? What would you want our new manager to be like?”

“Right...”

She stared into the sky with her usual pokerface:

“I like cute people.”

“No, cute people... Are we still talking about the new manager?”

I knew that she liked cute things, but it was worrying when she brought it up in this kind of discussion.

“Rest easy. I won’t say something selfish like Himenokouji-san. I wouldn’t mind a man either, provided he was cute.”

“Don’t you think you’re being pretty selfish yourself?”

“At the very least, they can not be taller than 150cm, nor weigh greater than 40kg.”

“Yeah, that’s definitely selfish.”

“It’s fine. As long the new person looks cute, I’ll refrain from asking their age.”

“Even though you’re making that self-satisfied face with that compromise...”

“Then let’s settle with not asking their race.”

“Nope, that’s... no, never mind.”

I shook my head, giving up my protests. Honestly, if I went along with Nasuhara-san, there’d be no telling when it would end.

Even if we consider it, Nasuhara-san’s request was impossible. She was basically asking for a cute and small child. Children were the least likely to fit as a dorm manager.

“Then how about Ginbei? What’s your opinion?”

“Right, nothing special really, but...”

While pouring an after meal tea out of a thermos flask, she smiled:

“Diligent, well working, and we must find him reliable, yet not unpleasant after we start living under one roof — that kinda person would be good. When that manager gets appointed, I want to be an interviewer too. Also, I’d be grateful If we could have a trial period so we could check on that person’s working style.”

“...When you say you don’t have any special opinion, I get a hunch that you’ve really got quite a few of them...”

“What are you saying? Isn’t that obvious? Even if it’s just temporarily, we’re going to live with the person we pick for a long time. Actually, you could even say that I’m

humble for only requesting that much, you know?"

Well, probably.

The Kiwatari Family's lineage was composed of mainly merchants, and they were twice as picky in hiring employees.

"And also, it's going to be tough finding someone that meets Ginbei's standards. Just publishing a job offer won't be enough."

"By the way, the salary ain't high, ya know?"

Prez joined in again.

"This ain't just limited to the dorm manager. Liliana academy does have cash, but they're frugal, and fer a prestigious institution, the teaching pay ain't much. Yet people who wanna teach here never cease. It's gotta be because even top class enterprises can't compete with Liliana's prestige."

"Right... Our school is that amazing..."

"Aye. After teachin' in Liliana gives them enough prestige that they won't need to worry about their careers anymore. But then again, I doubt bein' a manager at this poor dorm'll give 'em much."

"...Is that true. Ginbei?"

"Please don't look at me as if you've given up without even tryin'. Even if it's extremely unlikely that we'll find someone like that, givin' up right from the start is for dejected losers. I don't like it."

"Well, that might be true..."

"At any rate, I welcome a new manager. Our dorm is unorganized at the moment, so it'd be great to have a new competent manager improve our living conditions. Let's trust that our board of directors and student council president can do that much."

"Aye, well said, Gingin. As expected of my number one love candidate, yer down to earth."

"When did my ranking get that high?"

"Well, it's so for now..."

Ignoring Ginbei's humble complaint, Prez clapped her hands.

"I'm repeatin' myself, but we're gonna get a manager for our dorm. The board of directors decided it, and I see no reason to oppose it. Well, I've got some authority in pickin' the personnel, so I'll promise ya I'll lure a splendid one in, aight? Obviously, I want to get someone I can use, ya know?"

She surveyed us for confirmation. Prez made some solid points, and my sister, Nasuhara-san, and Ginbei didn't object. The same went for me, of course.

"Aight, I'm countin' on you guys. At any rate, goes without sayin' that ye guys are

makin' demandin' requests, so we won't find someone instantly. Let's pray we'll get a manager we can accept."

...And with that, we decided to get someone to replace me, a mere minor, as the dorm manager.

And I didn't know whether I should look forward to it or not.

Notes

1. Foodstuff. [Google](#) knows things.

May 10th, 12:30 P.M. (Student Dormitory - Manager Room)

And then, the next day...

I collapsed.

"It's the summer flu. You also have anemia from overworking yourself."

That was the doctor's clear and simple diagnosis. He had come to our dorm for my check up.

"Be sure to get plenty of rest and nutrition. It's the only way to cure this. Resting for three or four days in your futon should be enough."

After giving these instructions, he prescribed some medication for me and left.

Oh man, I really lost face. I prided myself on having a sturdy body, and I hadn't had to see a doctor in years. The stress from transferring schools, moving to the dorms, and dealing with manuscript deadlines had unexpectedly piled up in a short time. My body couldn't handle it.

Well, now that it's come to this, it can't be helped. I'll take a break from work and school while I try to recover.

I thought just lying in a futon for days would be boring, but I could only resign myself to my fate. When I started resting, I was grateful my illness hadn't already turned into pneumonia or something.



...Yeah, that was my mindset; I didn't take this seriously. However, it was quite different for everyone else.

"Now I've done it, eh? For me of all people to make such a blunder."

Prez, who was usually so cheerful that she irritated me, heaved a long sigh.

"So I can't even look after ma subordinates' health. Guess Nikaidou Arashi's still just a kid. That was a thorough lesson, jeez..."

"It's not just you, President. I, too, must be held accountable."

Nasuhara-san said with a rare, meek expression.

"Now that I think of it, Akkii's looked rather unhealthy lately. Yet I unthinkingly overlooked it because he didn't say anything, and the changes were trivial."

"If you're goin' that far, then it's also my fault."

And then Ginbei chimed in. She looked downcast. Like the others, she didn't blame me for neglecting my own health:

"I've boasted about how long I've known Akito, but I didn't even notice anything. I can't believe I called myself his close friend..."

"....."

As for Akiko, she was hanging her head in silence, completely dejected. Maybe because she had been busy lamenting her own worthlessness, she ended up sitting motionlessly at my bedside with a haggard expression. She didn't let go of my hand.

"Nono. Please wait a second, everyone."

I smiled wryly while lying on the futon:

"I just caught a cold and am bedridden. Why are you all being so gloomy? C'mon, be noisy as usual. I'd feel more at ease if you said stuff like, 'You're an idiot for catching a cold.'"

"You might say that, ya see..."

Prez shook her head.

"We can't help feelin' responsible, ya know? We pushed everythin' involvin' the dorm onto you. Ya could say I'm exagerratin', but we're the reason yer sufferin' through this, ya know?"

"That's definitely an exaggeration. To begin with, you're busier than me, Prez. And it's the same with Nasuhara-san, Ginbei, and Akiko, right? And yet I'm the only one who ended up in this sorry state. It's obviously my own fault. There's nothing for you guys to feel guilty about."

"Before we knew it, we ended up dependin' on ya, or, put another way, we started givin' ya more things to do, and then you suddenly ended up doin' pretty much everything..."

"I didn't expect things to pile up, that's for sure. Anyhow, I *did* say that it was taking a toll on me, but I didn't think I'd actually collapse. It can't be helped."

"Yer voice is already gettin' hoarse and small."

"Well, I've got a cold and I'm lying down. It's natural that it's hard for me to talk."

"Yer complexion ain't good either. It ain't different from someone who's about to die."

"Well, I'm suffering from a fever and have a cough. If I looked fine, then I'd probably be pretending to be sick. Or rather, don't say something so ominous in front of a sick person— like I'm about to die or something!"

"S-Sorry 'bout that. My tongue slipped. Please forgive me."

"Ah, no. If you're that apologetic, it starts to worry me."

I quickly responded to Prez, who had curled herself up. I was hoping to smooth over the awkwardness by talking a lot, but that wasn't enough to get through to her.

"However, ya..."

Prez raised her head again.

"Wouldn't it be better to go to the hospital? Ya were completely against it, so we let you go with only a doctor visit, but..."

"I won't go to a hospital. It's a simple cold."

"Don't'cha say simple when ya collapsed so heavily. The doctor said ya were overworked too, and couldn't there be complications like pneumonia if yer careless? Legally speaking, we should be tyin' your hands and feet up and takin' you to the hospital by force."

"That's why I'm saying that you're exaggerating. I wouldn't be able to talk to you guys like I am now if it were that bad, right? I can't think of anything more embarrassing than getting hospitalized for overwork and a cold. To say nothing of what would happen if the Takanomiya Family got wind of this. Obviously nothing good would come out of it."

"That's, well, true... Probably."

"Yeah. For those reasons, please keep this a secret, okay? Please make something up and deceive them while I'm absent."

"I understand that reasonin'. I swear it by the name of Nikaidou Arashi. But..."

"It's really because Akito's scared of doctors, right...?"

Ginbei sighed from the side.

"It's been like this since the old days, you know? To begin with, he never caught a cold and he didn't get hurt, so he didn't have the chance to be hospitalized. He also refused to attend his annual checkups. Why do you hate doctors so much, Akito..."

"Even if you ask me why... I hate what I hate. I can't help it, you know?"

I shrugged my shoulders, still lying down:

"Doctors tamper with other people's bodies. They'll apologize as if they're sorry when they put stethoscopes on our chests, yet they give us injections and cut us open! It's too much. Aah, that's enough. just thinking about it makes me fidgety. Anyways, as long as it's not a matter of life and death, I want to avoid doctors as much as I can. Humans can be resilient, so there's no need to suggest things like medication and hospitalization for such trifling matters. Let's rely more on self-healing, alright?"

"...Well, it's like that."

Ginbei shrugged her own shoulders in return:

"This guy is so afraid of doctors it's pretty much an illness. But still, since spoke up about it, I want to respect his wishes. Of course, if it gets worse, we're gettin' him into

a hospital even if he's thrashin' and flailin' in resistance."

Everyone seemed to agree with Ginbei. Although, if it did turn into something nasty, even I wouldn't be stubborn. I wouldn't want to die and leave my sister on her own, after all.

By the way, I was lying about why I didn't want to go to the hospital. The real reason was different: what if they took a blood test or something, and they revealed that my sister and I weren't blood related?

But practically speaking, I didn't think they would figure it out. I doubted they'd actually do a full DNA scan. But instinctively, I just hated the idea of it happening.

"In any case, that's how it is."

Prez joined in again:

"Now that it's come to this, let's do our best to help Himenokouji Akito recover. We'll have him rest up and push him towards a full recovery! Now, to help him recover—"

"Devoted nursing! There's nothing else!"

And...

Akiko, who had looked so dazed that I wondered if her soul was slipping out, raised her head resolutely:

"Let's forget how worthless I was for not noticing Onii-chan's poor health! I can be as sorry as I want whenever I want! But right now helping him get better is more important!"

She tightly squeezed my hand. I was suddenly seized by uneasiness:

"Please leave it to me, Onii-chan! Please feel that you are in safe hands as you entrust everything to me——"

"I wonder if you could hold on just a moment."

Nasuhara-san interjected. She had her usual pokerface, but even so, she looked uneasy.

"You speak as if you were solely liable for his current condition, and are, therefore, solely responsible for nursing him. But, as every person here failed to notice Akki's deteriorating health, and not a single person is innocent of exhausting Akki with errands or chores, you might consider that all of us — not just you — are liable as well."

"That's right. I completely agree."

Ginbei supported her:

"We're comrades livin' under the same roof. We're even kindred souls who are members of the same student council, so we share our lot with each other, so to say. Akito's health worsened and he collapsed. There's no way that we could just, for example, comment how lucky we are that it wasn't anything worse, agree 'yep, that's

true,' and then go about our daily lives. Wouldn't we also take responsibility for nursin' Akito?"

"No. Your assistance is not required."

Akiko shook her head resolutely:

"I am Onii-chan's little sister and his only family in the world. Regardless of how long I've been deep in love with Onii-chan, letting this happen to him is unforgivable. I couldn't face Onii-chan again if I didn't restore my honor by doing my best to nurse him."

"Aren't those personal reasons? We're not children, so I'd rather we try not to force our own opinions onto others while thinking only of ourselves."

"It's as Nasuhara-san said. Akiko-kun, it's narrow-minded of you to say that you alone feel responsible and that you alone will nurse Akito. To begin with, goin' by your logic, shouldn't I, the one who bragged about bein' Akito's close friend for six years, feel your guilt manyfold? I even think I'm the one who should nurse him alone."

"I wonder if you wouldn't mind waiting for a moment there, Gingin. I'm the one who should be nursing Akkii by myself. If you must know why, it's because Akkii and I are forming a new comedy duo, and we intend to become legends in the comedy world. It's common sense that the bonds in such a combi are stronger than those in family or friendship. So in the end, obviously I'm the one who should look after him by myself."

"I don't know nothin' about that, or rather, it's the first time I ever heard anything like it. Akito going into the comedy world... It's way past a joke — more like a nightmare. It's the opposite of 'the right person at the right place.' It's like a marathon runner going for the 100 meter dash in the olympics. As far as I'm concerned, it'd be fine if Akito became my business partner sooner or later and we did business while travelin' all over the world. He has talent for that."

"I agree that he has talent, but please don't go ahead and say things at your own convenience, you two. First of all, more than anything, I wish you wouldn't forget that this is *our* family problem. It's preposterous that we shame ourselves by accepting an outsider's help. Therefore, I'm the one who should..."

"What utter tyranny. It is I who should—"

"What are you sayin'? No matter how you look at it, I'm the most suitable."

"Nono, it's the little sister's job to——"

"Get'cha selves together, ya guys."

Prez, astonished at the scene, reined them in:

"We did say that Himenokouji Akito's recovery has the highest priority, but what are you doing quarrellin' before the person in question? It ain't somethin' you should talk about in front of a sick person tryin' to rest. Restrain yerselves."

Her voice was calm, yet forceful. Her tone wasn't one of anger, but it compelled the other girls to stop arguing. The three of them hung their heads in shame as if they

were children being scolded by their teacher.

These three were unsurpassed in their willfulness. As expected of Nikaidou Arashi, her presence was magnificent. She wasn't the student council president at a prestigious academy just for show.

"...Okay. If that's the case, let's do this."

Prez took control in the now deathly silent room, speaking as brightly as she could.

"Normally, if multiple skilled people volunteer to nurse someone, they can cooperate. But ya guys would just argue over this and that. It'd be better to set a schedule and nurse him in turns."

"They decide on times and take turns?"

I reacted in place of the three who were still awkwardly silent. Prez nodded with an 'aye.'

"This way everyone can take care of ya personally. How about during each person's turn, the others aren't allowed to meddle with'cha, be it by hand or mouth? At any rate, they keep claimin' they're the best at nursin'. This lets 'em settle that too, meanin' we kill two birds with one stone."

"I see, that might just work..."

Although I replied supportively, I didn't think I needed any nursing for a mere cold from overworking. Well, I doubt I could convince any of them though.

"Well then, ya three can do somethin' like rock-paper-scissors to decide yer turns. And after Himenokouji Akito regains his health, he can decide who did the best. So no more complaining, aight?"

Same Day, 1:00 P.M. (Student Dormitory ▪ Manager Room) (Nasuhara-san's Turn)

They decided to nurse me in three hour shifts. Using rock-paper-scissors, they decided the order was: Nasuhara-san, Ginbei, and Akiko. Until I recovered, one of them would be nursing me at all times, be it day or night. They didn't care for their own sleep.

Well, I *should* be grateful...

Regardless of whether they were forcing it onto me, nursing was a difficult and serious job, and here three people had volunteered to do it. Dying alone was so common it was a social problem, so I wanted thank the heavens from the bottom of my heart for my luck. It was debatable whether everyone needed to be nursed, but giving patients attentive care would definitely put them at ease and facilitate recovery.

But... there was a problem here.

During each person's timeslot, everyone else was prohibited from interfering in any way, shape, or form. This meant only one person at a time could be in the room with me. I was stuck in this room with my current nurse, and it was ensured that no one would interrupt us. There was no telling what might happen.



"Well then, Akkii. I'll take good care of you, so please be at ease. I'll rid you of whatever ailment you have at once."

"...No, you're not a doctor or a nurse. Isn't it impossible to cure me instantly?"

First up was Nasuhara Anastasia.

She was my acquaintance, a talented woman with unyielding audacity and a beautiful face that seemed to come from fiction— and, more than anything, her ability points for general housework were devastatingly low. She was lethally inept for someone who managed a house, and with all due respect, out of all the girls in this dorm, she was least suited for nursing.

"Before that, let me something basic, silly as it may be."

"What might it be?"

"Have you ever nursed anyone before?"

"Now, you are aware that that is quite rude of you."

Nasuhara-san scoffed, her expression unchanging .

"I am perfectly competent at nursing. And for argument's sake, anyone who has lived in modern society for 16 years would have experience in it, would they not?"

"That may be true, but I'm worried since you're not good at cooking or cleaning."

"That's irrelevant. Although I am almost shockingly incompetent at housework, in nursing that is far from the case. Rather, I'm so talented that others wonder if I was blessed by the gods."

"Hee, that's unexpected. Doing house chores and nursing people are basic skills, and I thought they were pretty much the same thing. So you're an exception, huh..."

It felt like someone just said that they were great at solving simultaneous equations even though they couldn't do multiplication and division. *Oh well, I guess things turn out that way sometimes. They do say that reality can be stranger than fiction.*

"Well, either way, this sounds promising. I'm sorry for taking up your time, but I'll be in your care."

"Understood. Please tremble in awe at the formidable height of my medical prowess."

"I'd like to ask something about that prowess."

"Go ahead."

"So who did you nurse, exactly? I'd guess it was your dad or mom, but..."

"No. I nursed my teddy bear, Jonathan."

"WHO SAW THAT COMING—?!"

Lying on my bed, I was at my wits' end.

This was Nasuhara-san, so when she said she was good at nursing, I had wondered if there was more than meets the eye. Like... she couldn't possibly have counted nursing a non-living thing as experience, right?

"Akkii, quiet down. It is rather inappropriate of you to raise your voice."

"Says the person who made me raise my voice in the first place!"

"It's fine. I won't deny that Jonathan was a teddy bear, but he certainly had a soul, and he was my friend. Nursing him gave me the same experience as nursing people, you know?"

"As if! More like experience for real bears."

"By the way, not only did I nurse him, I also performed extensive surgeries. When a vicious dog left Jonathan steps away from the gates of heaven, I attended to him immediately. Thanks to my precise and efficient surgery, he escaped a gruesome death by a fraction of a second."

"That's not surgery, that's sewing! Wait, how did you sew when you can't even do household chores?!"

"By the way, the stuffing ended up dangling out from the wound I sewed up, you

know? And it is quite possible that I interchanged his right arm and leg when I reattached them.”

“So if you think about it, the so-called surgery was a terrible failure anyway!”

“It’s fine. It’s not as if he died.”

“He was never alive to begin with!”

“In order to save his life, the treatment was crucial. If he bears a grudge for it, I will accept the blame without protest.”

“Look, I told you...! No, tsukkomi’ing any further won’t get me anywhere, so let’s stop that!”

“Would you like some water?”

“...If you would please.”

I sat up and accepted the cup Nasuhara-san presented.

Oh man, I should have known better, I did some flashy tsukkomi’ing, and now I’m panting. At this rate, my cold will get worse.

“Ehm, Nasuhara-san?”

“Yes?”

“Thanks for the water. I’d like to sleep and rest for now.”

“Oh? Of course. Please rest to your heart’s content. Sleep as if you were dead, and don’t worry. You’ll be fine even if you forget to breathe. Then you’ll be embraced by Hades, the god of the underworld in Greek mythology.”

“Why are those comparisons so dark... Well, it’s fine. Anyway, I’ll sleep. Good night.”

“Yeah. Good night.”

Confirming that Nasuhara-san with her pokerface was sitting beside me, and I closed my eyes.

My whole body felt heavy, my joints hurt like crazy, and it felt like there was a haze in my head.

When we checked my temperature not long ago, it was around 37 to 38 degrees. That was typical for a cold.

My heavy body and lack of vitality was irrefutable proof that I had overworked myself after all. But even so, in the corner of my mind I was alert, so I couldn’t fall asleep. I couldn’t help sighing at my inability to control my own body. That, too, was a malady of my crumbling physical condition. Oh boy, being sick was a real pain in the arse.

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"Akkii. Do you want me to do something, I wonder?"

Roughly five minutes had passed since I closed my eyes.

Suddenly, Nasuhara-san addressed me again.

"During my turn, I intend to use whatever method it takes to nurse you, be it fair or foul. I'm going to give you anything you desire, and I want you to speak without reservation."

"Thank you, but I'm fine. I don't want anything in specific right now."

"Restraint is futile. Right, for example, would you like me to wipe off your sweat?"

"No, I'm fine. I haven't even sweated that much."

"Aren't you hungry, I wonder?"

"Yeah... I'm fine for now."

"Don't even want to sate your hunger?"

"Yeah, I'm okay. But thanks. You're being really considerate. Anyway, I'm going to try to sleep."

"Understood. Good night."

After Nasuhara-san nodded, I closed my eyes once again.

As I said before, I was confident that my body was strong. How could I let my body get chained to the bed like this? Everything that had been piling up lately must have taken a larger toll on me than I thought. It started with the exchange between the Takanomiyas, the Arisugawas, and so on and went on with moving residences and other things... Thinking about it now, haven't I already done a lifetime's worth of work?

Oh well.

I should be grateful I wasn't stuck in bed back when I was much busier. I should use this chance to take it easy and recover. That way I can return to my work and studies completely refreshed. That sounds good, yep.

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"Akkii. Would you like me to do something?"

And then another five minutes had passed. Just as I had dozed off, Nasuhara-san repeated her question.

"...No. Nothing special."

I blinked many times, but was still half asleep.

“Well, if I had to say, I would mention that I’d love to get some sleep.”

“Please don’t restrain yourself. Would you like me to wipe off your sweat, for instance?”

“No, I’m fine. There isn’t any sweat to wipe.”

“Then perhaps I should wipe your lower half?”

“...Why did you narrow it down from my entire body to my lower half?”

“So you do not presently require any service?”

“Yeah, something like that. But thanks for worrying about me.”

“You’re welcome. And good night.”

After smiling at the same old shameless Nasuhara-san, I pulled my blanket over my head again. But really. This kind of thing...

A month ago— actually, even less than that— I would never have thought that Nasuhara Anastasia would be nursing me like this. Especially not in this room, which was only supposed to be for my sister and me.

The odd relationships I’ve formed will always remind me that people can be brought together in mysterious ways. Accepting and skillfully handling those various encounters that befall us is a wise way to live, for regardless of whether the encounters are good or bad, they surely add spice to our lives.

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“Akkii. Would you like me to do something?”

It was the same line for the third time now.

“...Ehm. No, I don’t need anything in particular.”

“Humbleness may be a virtue of the Japanese, but considering your situation, I think you would do well to rely on others. If it’s something like wiping sweat, I’ll be glad to do it any time.”

“...Rather, is that the only thing you can do when it comes to nursing?”

“That is, of course, untrue.”

Nasuhara-san refuted me with no change in her expression.

And even though she said, ‘That is, of course, untrue’, she didn’t follow-up on it. She knelt by my futon without any change in posture. She was unexpectedly gazing into empty space, so I had no idea whether her eyes were focused on something.

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As I had said many times already, Nasuhara Anastasia didn't move most of the muscles in her face. She was eloquent, and she consistently maintained an appearance of calmness and self-possession — in the academy she was considered an ice goddess. Add in her beautiful face, and it's no wonder people sort of considered her a deity. But... Something was off today.

Her jokes were the same as usual in our conversation just now, but I felt they were somewhat half-hearted. Contrary to her cool appearance, wasn't she surprisingly bad at being quiet? Well, I couldn't deny that she was a skilled speaker. But she let her mouth run off to her heart's content whenever she was with student council members or at the dorm.

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Huh? Was that just a coincidence?

"Hey, Nasuhara-san?"

"What might it be?"

"At first glance you look as you usually do, but... by any chance, are you about to blow a fuse?"

"What are you babbling about, stuuupid?"

Nasuhara-san exaggeratedly shrugged.

"That's absurd, right? How could I possibly be at a loss in *this* kind of situation? That's an incredibly foolish misunderstanding. Rather, I'm totally composed. Supernormal like always and totally not nervous."

"Yeah. You *are* about to, as I thought, huh?"

Putting aside that she was about to blow a fuse, she was shaking oddly too.

"That's not true. I'm the same as usual. Normal operation."

"Is that so? I don't quite see that, though."

"No, it's true. It's as unchanging as the velocity of our Earth's rotation. Just like a bug is of no significance in a program with unparalleled accuracy, something as insignificant as this could not possibly affect me. When you claim that I'm about to 'blow a fuse,' you're acting as thoughtless as a judge who mandated a death sentence without trial."

"Yeah, I see. Sorry... By the way, you fixed the way you're talking, but aren't you going to fix the way you're addressing yourself?^[1]"

"You must have misheard. I committed no error of personal address."

"You see. That excuse still won't do."

"Whatever the case, I demand you submit evidence to back up your false views. What year and month did that happen? At what hour, minute, and second did I commit that kind of mistake?"

“Ah, ye, got it. Sorry for that just now.”

I apologized for the time being, but her attitude felt like a confession.

I was surprised. When she wasn't making jokes, neither her expression nor her tone ever changed — that was the kind of person Nasuhara Anastasia was. Maybe she just can't act normally in this type of situation?

Well, having a girl who can't do chores nursing someone was like making an elementary student do calculus. To make matters worse, she was alone with me, so she had to nurse me by herself. She couldn't rely on anyone else for help or advice, and she couldn't do any research... It was like playing an away game, and in that case it wouldn't be surprising if she acted differently from her usual self.

But in spite of that, she was still here.

“Hey, Nasuhara-san?”

“What might it be? If you're thinking about investigating my character discrepancy further, you will have to bring the matter before a courtroom.”

“No. I wasn't going to bring that up again.”

“Hmpf, I won't fall for that. It's a scheme to lull me into a false sense of security so I'll say something careless. Then you'll turn the tables on me and use it as evidence in court, no?”

“Nono. This isn't big enough to hire a lawyer over.”

“Hmpf, such a shallow lie won't work. Rather, I will firmly stand in the face of your cajolery—”

“Thank you, Nasuhara-san.”

From my futon, I smiled at the paranoid vice president.

“Even though you were about to have a meltdown from doing something you weren't good at, you still tried to help me out. That's kind of you, and just having you next to me makes a big difference. It's reassuring. Anyway, thank you.”

“.....”

“But, you see, I don't think this heavy atmosphere is a good thing, and I don't think you should be moping around. Can you just be yourself? They say that ‘sickness and health start with the mind,’ and you agree with that, right?”

“.....”

How would she react? Nasuhara-san hadn't moved for a while now... She was still kneeling, and her eyes were focused on the day after tomorrow or some other unfathomable place — anyway, she wasn't reacting.

Ah. Or so I thought, but just then she turned away from me.

“Nasuhara-san?”

"The sun is unbearable today."

With her back turned to me, Nasuhara-san fanned her neck with her hand.

"You can't help feeling hot and dazzled with the sun this ferocious, right?"

"Really? It's still May, and the weather feels just right to me."

"Perhaps, but not if you have light eye and skin color like me. It wouldn't be a problem if I had sunglasses on, but... Anyway, I'm sorry, but I had to reseal myself."

"Sounds like, well, a big problem... By the way, Nasuhara-san?"

"What might it be?"

"For some reason your ears have been bright red for a while now."

"...That must be an optical illusion. The lighting could very well be the explanation."

Rebellious till the end... She could have just obediently accepted the praise I had gone out of my way to give.

But it's alright. As I said a few moments ago, having her beside me was reassuring enough. I would've wanted her by my side even if she wasn't doing anything. Although if she actually nursed me it would be more of a burden than a help.

I only met Nasuhara Anastasia two months ago, and objectively speaking, we had only chatted about general things, but I already considered her a close friend.

Yep. It's a good thing.

I was lucky to have met someone like her in the short time since I transferred to St. Liliانا. Mind you, it was my sister's school, so me being admitted was almost a miracle. But it looks like I made the right choice in the end.

"——Hey, Akkii..."

And so, with her back still turned to me, Nasuhara-san suddenly said:

"I thought of something about nursing, and it has nothing to do with wiping off sweat."

"Oh? Is that so?"

That was good news.

I was relying on Nasuhara-san for now, and I wanted my cold gone earlier, even if only by a second. I'd be thrilled if she had a way to speed up my recovery.

"That sounds good. Please, by all means."

"Very well, since you've requested it."

"So? What are you going to do exactly?"

Typical treatment would be, well, putting a cold towel on my forehead? And then letting me use her lap as a lap pillow while singing me a lullaby... No, that's just for kids. It'd make more sense to make and feed me rice porridge. Or maybe some

medicine?

Yeah.

When I thought about it, there were surprisingly few things you could do to nurse someone suffering from a cold. After all, patients only needed nutrition and rest——

“Right. First of all, I’d like you to close your eyes.”

I was lost in thought, and what Nasuhara-san said surprised me.

“Eh? Close my eyes? Why?”

“Even if you ask me why, I can only respond that it’s necessary.”

“...So basically, shut up and sleep? That’s... Well, it’s true I can only sleep since I’m bedridden with a cold.”

“It’s not that. You have to close your eyes even if you don’t sleep... Although I suppose it would be preferable that you slept.”

It was an order I couldn’t understand well.

I didn’t mind sleeping, and I would’ve done so even without her asking, but... I had already been trying to fall asleep for a while now.

“It’s a good luck charm, so to speak.”

Nasuhara-san spoke again.

“Incidentally, this procedure is irrational. It won’t work if you don’t believe in good luck charms. Listen obediently if you want it to work.”

So there was also that way, huh? It had gone out of fashion since present day science was more advanced, but turning to spiritualism and shamanism to cure illnesses wasn’t anything new. I didn’t believe in them at all, but I’d be grateful and do as Nasuhara-san said since she asked me to.

“Got it. Well then, I’m in your hands.”

“I’ll do my best. Well then, go ahead and close your eyes. Do not open them under any circumstances.”

I let my eyelids fall as she commanded. I had no complaints since I understood her reasons. Besides, resting like this was what I’d wanted all along.

Well then. What the heck was the charm Nasuhara-san wanted to give me?

“...*inhaling deeply*... *exhaling deeply*...”

When I strained my ears, I heard faint, repeated deep breathing. Was she trying to focus? If so, things were getting serious.

“...*inhaling deeply*... *exhaling deeply*...”

It was the deep breathing again. Sometimes long and deep, sometimes short and flat.

When I listened intently, it sounded as if there were repeated cycles of tension and relief in her breathing... Instead of trying to focus, it seemed as if she was struggling with indecisiveness. But there was no reason that giving me a charm for my cold would warrant such hesitation. Really, what was Nasuhara-san trying to do?

Several minutes passed. I was going a bit numb.

Her unsteady breathing was unchanged... Wouldn't it be better to say something here?

"...Ehm."

"Be quiet."

What came back was refusal.

"I'll correct myself. Don't just close your eyes; close your mouth too. If you don't, my tiny bit of courage will—— I mean, I'm taking great pains to concentrate, and you're interrupting me. Be like a doll and don't move."

"Ah, okay, Well. If you say so, I will."

"Don't move."

"Not even an inch?"

"But you're permitted to breathe."

"That's... a given."

Following that exchange, I obediently closed my mouth and stilled my body.

But with her being so evasive, what the heck was the charm she was going to pull out of her sleeve? It had to be an incredibly serious miracle charm. Or maybe she was just fooling around, and it'll turn out to be a joke?

Hmm, both seemed possible. I couldn't read Nasuhara-san's mind; to me she was like a jack-in-the-box or a mystery chest. Or rather, was this posture alright? With my eyes shut and my body frozen, and with breathing being the only thing I was allowed to do, I was basically asleep, right? And since I had a cold from overworking myself, sleeping was also my only alternative. And, well, Nasuhara-san said herself that I should rest, right? As a patient, it was my job to rest up, but even so, was it really okay to sleep now? Nasuhara-san was going out of her way to give me a good luck charm. It'd be rude to sleep without asking for her permission. My parents were eccentric, but they still taught me the bare minimum of etiquette. I wanted to be courteous at least, and as their heir, I didn't to bring shame to the Himenokouji Family. I also had to attend to my daily studies and——

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.....

Ha—?!

Nonono. I was dozing off right after saying. If that happened, I wouldn't be able to face Nasuhara-san. Even though she was doing her best to focus her mind and give me that good luck charm, if I fell asleep... There was a limit to how impolite I could be. Even though this situations screamed 'please just sleep!' I had to follow proper etiquette.

——While thinking about things like that, I opened my heavy eyelids. I saw Nasuhara-san's figure.

Her position had vastly changed from moments ago, when she had her back to me and was further away.

Now she was right in front of my eyes and nose — I had been sleeping face up. I could count her eyelashes, and I could almost feel the moist breath from her lips on my skin — she was that close.

She had squeezed her eyes shut, and her shoulders were lightly shaking.

On top of that, what did she want to do? With her eyes shut at point blank range, she unsteadily hovered a bit in every direction — from my forehead over to my cheeks, and then back to my lips. While I thought that, she went ahead and came back to my forehead. A puzzling movement. It was as if she was dowsing my face on a treasure hunt or trying and failing to pick her next dish during dinner.

Actually, it was a curious movement.



As the aforementioned had taken me by surprise, I unthinkingly said the first thing that came to mind:

“Eh? What are you doing?”

“_____?!”

Nasuhara-san opened her eyes wide in surprise, her shoulders trembled, and her movements stopped. *No, I'm the one who should be surprised here, you know...*

We stared at each other like that for a bit. Nasuhara-san had frozen up like a cat that had been caught red-handed snacking on some food. She slowly returned to her usual expressionless self.

“...I wonder what you're doing, Akkii...”

“Eh—? What I'm...? That's my line...”

“Even though I explicitly asked you to hold still with your eyes and mouth shut, why did you open your eyes and mouth, and on top of that, start moving too?”

“Ah— No, that's, errr, how to put it? When you're almost dozing off and then and you snap out of it all of a sudden. It's pretty common. I had closed my eyes for a while, right? I nodded off before I knew it, and then...”

“So in other words, you're implicitly criticizing my speed as slow. I wonder, are you trying to blame me by saying I should've been faster?”

“Nonono. Nothing like that, of course. I answered your question honestly, and there's not really anything——”

“It seems you're hard of hearing. In any case, this time you're not even allowed to breathe.”

“Wait. Murder's not the answer!”

“Hmpf. Then it seems the good luck charm has been ruined.”

Nasuhara-san said, separating herself from me and brushing her hair repeatedly.

By the way, she had short twin-tails, so there was little hair to brush up. And although she had returned to her expressionless and cool self, her face remained bright red.

“That extinguished what little courage I had — I mean, it permanently extinguished the energy from the universe or something that was required for the good luck charm. It is now impossible to proceed further.”

“Is that so... No, I'm sorry. It's because I did something careless...”

“Jeez. I demand that you seriously reflect on your actions.”

“Sorry, sorry, I will... So, what were you trying to do? You drew near my face after having me specifically close my eyes. There was also those strange movements?”

“That's... It doesn't matter anymore. Arguing over lost possibilities is as useless as crying over spilt milk. I want to face the future optimistically, and someone as composed as I would not fuss over what could have been.”

After she said that, Nasuhara-san suddenly looked the other way.

“By the way, I'd like to confirm something...”

With her back to me, she continued:

“Obviously, I didn’t scheme to give you a good luck charm for your cold by kissing you after you closed your eyes. And I absolutely did not vacillate between kissing your forehead, cheek, or lips. I also did not try to get revenge for accurate guesses earlier — please don’t misunderstand.”

“...Your explanation is oddly specific, huh?”

“It can’t be helped. People often form very specific misunderstandings.”

“Eeehm, so it’s like that? So it might have looked like you were trying to kiss me, but you were really just you trying to give me a good luck charm?”

“Of course. And also I’ll explain this just in case, but you should be aware I certainly did not consider kissing you and saying something conceited like ‘that’s the good luck charm.’”

I see.

Well, if she’s going that far, I can only believe her. I don’t know what she’d do to me if I didn’t.

But it was a pity. I had missed my chance of getting Nasuhara-san’s rare nursing/good luck charm. Even if I made a request, it felt like I had already missed the right timing... If I wanted another chance, I’d have to catch another cold.

Although, I didn’t intend on letting myself catch another cold, so there probably wouldn’t be a second chance.

...Yep, and you see...It was only my intuition, but Nasuhara-san’s nursing felt dangerous. This ending seemed to be better for various people. I guess I should be grateful. Yep.

Notes

1. She’s jumping between her usual polite “watakushi” and the girly “atashi”.

Same Day, 4:00 P.M. (Student Dormitory • Manager Room) (Ginbei's Turn)

Sick people find a certain relief in company, and for that reason, I consider it a form of nursing. Without it, they are drowned in loneliness and isolation, which eats into their hearts and drains the most important thing they need to heal: their will to recover. This claim is self-evident and uncontradicted by experience, as it requires neither verification nor explanation.

I didn't think my close friend, who excelled at dynamic methods, could use this passive approach.

"Now then, Akito. You can rest easy now that I'm here."

It was Ginbei's turn, and she had switched with Nasuhara-san. Ginbei's confident demeanor was that of a veteran benchwarmer who finally had her once in a lifetime chance to play.

"Rest assured and leave everything to me. I, Sawatari Ginbei Haruomi, know everything there is to know about this. I'll remove those demons inside you."

"Ah, yeah, thanks... Or wait..."

Smiling bitterly, I eyed the backpack she had brought in. It was made for mountain climbing, and it was gigantic. It looked like she was about to climb Mt. Everest; her backpack was so overpacked that stuff was spilling out. It seemed she intended to nurse me with it.

"Isn't that a bit... too much?"

"I had to wait three hours for my turn, right? So I went to a couple places for preparations."

"No, I'm grateful, but... Doing all of that just to nurse a mere cold... you know?"

"The cold is a precursor for all kinds of diseases, and it's dreadful on its own too. With all due respect, this thing you call a 'mere cold' has taken countless lives since the ancient times. It has a high outbreak rate, and it's harder to eradicate than any incurable disease or plague by far. It would be unforgivable if I took this 'mere cold' lightly and you had an unlikely complication because of it. It would be a permanent grave stain on me."

Somebody's definitely exaggerating here, but in the end, she's just a close friend who's worried about me. It'd be stupid to Tsukkomi her.

And yet...

Setting aside cookware like saucepans and kitchen knives, I could swear I glimpsed gohei and ofuda in the opening on her backpack. What the heck?

"In ancient times, entreating a god was a legitimate form of nursing."

Ginbei, who probably had noticed my gaze, looked triumphant.

"No matter how far they advance in modern science and medical technology, they'll never completely understand the complicated and mysterious human heart. And that's where spiritual treatments like shamanism come into play. These charms have been handed down in the Sawatari Family for generations. They'll bolster your willpower, makin' them helpful enough."

"I'm grateful that you brought them, but, how should I put it... Quite frankly, I don't think stuff like praying to gods is that effective."

"It's fine. *These* Sawatari charms *will* work nonetheless."

Ginbei was brimming with confidence. Well, if she was that confident, I can probably believe her — or so she'd want me to think. However, I was a staunch atheist.

"Well, be at ease. There are multiple charms. Didn't I tell you? I, Sawatari Ginbei Haruomi, am aware of every method known to man. At least this time I'll — no, not just this time, I'll always do everythin' I can to keep you healthy."

"Is that so? Okay. If you're going that far, then it's definitely trustworthy. And the bulge in that backpack is evidence of that, right?"

"That's right. Now then, shall we start?"

With that authoritative declaration, Ginbei rolled up her sleeves. Looking at how she was psyching herself up, you'd have thought she was preparing for a life or death surgery. It was pretty exaggerated.

With that, she started taking care of me. That style was just like her.

"Regardless of the time and place, in war, maintaining the supply lines is the basics of basics. It's a crucial factor in determining whether you win or lose. Even kids get that you can't fight on an empty stomach. Naturally, it's the same with colds."

...Ginbei was putting a lot of emphasis on that. *I see, so that backpack is mostly filled with cooking utensils.*

"That's it, right? This comes first after all."

She said, handing me the first dish: rice porridge. It seemed to be Shinsengayu, which was common in Hong Kong. It can instantly cure any cold, or so they say.

But putting aside whether or not that was true, this porridge was a masterpiece. It was tender, with a chicken bone base generously seasoned with spring onions and ginger. I could feel the flavor spreading through my body. I wouldn't have minded eating this every day even if I wasn't sick.

"I'm glad you like it. Next, how about this?"

Next up was the standard egg sake. It was just Japanese sake with added eggs and

sugar stirred over a low flame. With only familiar ingredients, it was a simple recipe — and yet, I'd never tasted anything like it.

Since each ingredient didn't taste good on its own, I was nervous at first. But, to my surprise, it was really good.

As for the taste, I wouldn't have been surprised if there was a cocktail with the same flavor. Also, if she had added milk and vanilla extract, I could have seen someone confusing this with pudding.

"It's good, right? I specifically choose sake that was well suited for heating. I was picky about the eggs and sugar too, of course."

Ginbei said, puffing up her chest with pride.

Although, I was a minor, and I didn't really drink, so she didn't need to fuss over it. She was being considerate, I guess. It was a problem that colds dull one's sense of taste, so I was grateful for her effort.

After that, I had various other food from Ginbei's backpack:

Charred garlic.

Dried burdock.

Boiled German camilla.

Mandarin powder.

Kumquat boiled with sugar.

Besides that, she also fed me a diverse selection of food that were reputed to have some medical effect.

Without a doubt, she had mobilized for an all out war. It was a large full course meal, and I wondered how she managed to make something of this size. Her course had excellent nutritional value; it was leaps and bounds ahead of that of regular meals. As expected from Ginbei, whose specialty was cooking.

"Phew... My stomach's really full."

"My, you're done already? I still have much up my sleeve though."

"If I eat any more, my body will break, and it won't be the cold's fault, you know... But thank you, Ginbei. These remedies aren't supposed to taste good, but everything I had was incredible. As expected of you, huh?"

"Fufu, Glad to hear that. Well then, shall we move on to stage two?"

"Stage two?"

"You thought I was done? Nutrition and medicine are just the beginning."

Ginbei said and closed one eye. Then she started stage two.

She smashed a dried plum and put it on my forehead. Then she had me smell baked

medicinal plant oil.

...Etc.

It looked like a display stand for folk remedies of unknown origins and uncertain effectiveness. She also used the charm-like ofuda and gohei I had seen earlier, and I thought that this was turning into a world expo on alternative cold treatments.

"This is amazing, huh? You're well prepared for pretty much anything."

"I used my knowledge and my connections. I didn't have much time, but I wanted to give you the best I could offer."

"Aren't you still overdoing it though? Pulling out all the stops seems a bit uncalled for."

"That doesn't matter. With my family, unless they're unproductive, we pilin' things up one by one."

"Even so... I feel like I'm a lab rate here."

"Isn't that what it means to be a patient? Being overmedicated and subjected to drastic procedures..."

"That's too unrestrained, you know..."

Although, normally you wouldn't be so thorough in taking care of someone with a cold. And besides, I had only overworked myself. Efficacy aside, she was being really kind to me.

"Ginbei."

"Hm? What is it?"

"Thank you. I'm really happy. It must have been a huge hassle to prepare all of this in three hours, right? You must have been frantically running all over the place. I owe you one."

"Yeah. That's great."

My close friend smiled satisfied, but...

"...Ah— By the way, Akito..."

"Hm? What?"

"How are you doing? Do you feel better?"

"Of course I feel better, Or that's what I'd like to say, but I collapsed recently, and you only just started nursing me. It still needs some time, you know?"

"Yeah, guess so. That's true..."

Ginbei was nodding slowly. It was as if she were flustered.

...What now? She looks a bit strange?

"Eeehm, Akito..."

Ginbei coughed to clear her throat.

“As you might know, my family’s lineage consists of merchants.”

“Yeah. That’s right.”

“To merchants, personal connections are dear. No matter how large the sum, no matter how priceless the item, in the end, personal connections are what are most valuable.”

“Yeah. That’s true.”

“But it’s annoying. Personal connections are harder to manage than money or merchandise. I guess that’s unsurprising since they’re more important, but managing personal connections carries substantial risks of its own. For example, I owe quite a few favors for the treatments I collected today. I can’t deny that those debts don’t have value of their own — this is one more thing that makes this topic so fascinating — however,”

“...Eeehm, Ginbei. I’m terribly sorry, but could we postpone your business lecture until after I’m on my feet again? You’ve gone out of your way to take care of me, and I was wondering if it wouldn’t be better for me to rest now.”

“Ah, s-sorry! I of all people...”

Ginbei shrugged her shoulders and coughed several times. She was ashamed.

Yep. Something’s strange after all.

She was calm and self-possessed by default, but eyes were wandering. It seemed like the excitement caused her slip of tongue.

She’s tense? Is that it? That would be rather unusual — I’ve never seen her so tense. Maybe she’s trying to say something important, and that’s what made her so stiff?

“Eeehm, I’ll be as brief as I can. In other words, Akito.”

“Yeah.”

“I’ve tried using many methods to cure you, but there’s still one thing I haven’t tried.”

“Ah, is that so?”

“Yeah. This treatment has been passed down the Sawatari Family for generations. It’s magnificent. It not only treats colds, but it’s effective against all illnesses too.”

“All illnesses? Is it really so amazing?”

“Yeah, there is. In truth, I had initial doubts too, but on researchin’ it I definitively verified its effectiveness. By the way, I asked people who were familiar with our relationship...”

Ginbei explained, flustered. *So it’s that?*

I knew it was a bad idea to tsukkomi here, but I dare say her explanation wasn’t exactly short. She had already given me plenty of care, and, in my opinion, I just

needed a good rest.

Hmm.

So, to make the most of her kindness too, it'd probably be better to decline her offer.

"You know, Ginbei."

"Hm? What is it?"

"I'm really grateful, but how about you hold off on the secret treatment that was passed down in your family for generations? There will be another chance one day."

"You id— what are you sayin'?!"

Ginbei's eyes grew big, and she seemed to be getting impatient.

"The treatment until now was, using culinary terms, the hors d'oeuvre! What kind of guest would dare stand up and leave before the main course?!"

"That might be true, but your full course already has me full with just the hors d'oeuvre..."

"That won't do, Akito. If we stop the treatment now, all the hardship I went through to make that preten— I mean, my meticulous preparations would be for nothing. It'd be as sad as makin' curry without using potatoes."

"I don't put potatoes in my curry to begin with..."

"Your preferences don't matter in this case. Anyways, if I let this chance slip, when would be the next— I mean, anyway, there's a time for everything. Stop being selfish and obey."

"You're being strangely stubborn, aren't you... Well, fine, I got it. So, do what you need to do, quickly. So, what exactly did you have in mind?"

"Y-Yeah..."

cough, *cough*.

She cleared her throat who knows how many times.

"Well, in short, you see..."

"Yeah?"

"Eeehm, that's, to put it simply..."

"Uh-huh?"

"Namely, what I'm tryin' to say is, for a close friend no kind of support would be unreasonable, and this time I can't just spout empty words. I need to take action. So _____"

"...Aren't you prolonging this too much?"

"Ugu— In other words!"

Her cheeks were reddening. She firmly shut her eyes, and said with her face slightly askew:

"I'm saying that to cure your cold, I'll sleep with you!"

"...Ha?"

This time it was my turn to have my eyes pop out.

"Eh, sleeping together, eh? With you?"

"That's right!"

"Ah... eeehm, just to confirm. By sleeping together, you mean that, right? You come into my futon, and we sleep together. Just that, right?"

"Yeah, that's it, exactly as you said! First and foremost, sleepin' together will preserve your body temperature — even more than that, more than anything, this way you won't feel insecure at all while you're recovering. If we can ease your anxiousness even a little, we absolutely have to do it! That's what I've heard!"

Oioioi—— My cold sweat is drawing a map of rivers on my shirt.

"No. Please wait a second, Ginbei. You're way overdoing it, you know?"

"Nothing would be overdoing it here. I'll do anything to help cure your cold. It's my obligation."

"Nonono. Please try to inject some common sense here, *common sense*. Right, why don't we calm down first? Let's chill off."

"My bad, but I am perfectly calm."

Ginbei declared, looking me resolutely in the eyes.

There was no trace of her panic from earlier. She was dead set on her task. On her eyes were engraved a steely resolution, that of kamikaze unit on the eve of the sally.

So it had come to this, huh? It didn't seem like she would yield. I gulped. At this point, I didn't think I could talk her out of it.

"Alright, got it. Let's do it, Ginbei."

"Eh—?! R-Really?!"

"Of course. You directly proposed it, so I should accept it gratefully. In for a penny, in for a pound—— that's not the best way to put it, but you've taken care of me, and sleeping together is the main dish, right? I accept the full course with pleasure."

"Th— Uh. T-That so? Yeah, that's right, huh?"

"Well now, now that that's decided, come here already. Ah, take care not to catch my cold, okay? After we're done, wash your hands, rinse your mouth, eat a nutritious meal, and rest. I can't accept your kindness if you don't do that."

"...It feels like we've switched positions, huh?"

Ginbei puffed her cheeks in dissatisfaction.

"It's like the old days, but... when you get serious, you don't waver, and you're suddenly energetic and resolute. Like the time you got your sister back. Maybe you're just bold"

"Well, maybe. I'm usually relatively shilly-shally, but when it counts... right? More importantly, Ginbei, hurry up and sleep with me."

"...We're really gonna do it?"

"Why are you even asking? You're the one who brought it up."

"That's true, but when you push that hard, it's like you're pullin' me in the other direction... You get it, right?"

"I understand, but it's a little too late to be saying that, right?"

"Hmm."

"Well, it might be too late now, but maybe we should stop after all? I'd be okay with it either way, no problem at all. It's not like it was my choice to begin with. It's up to you."

"Mumumu..."

Ginbei moaned strongly, even blushing up to her ears. I was merciless.

Not like she said it herself, but with this development Ginbei couldn't take the offensive anymore. And I intended to stick to the offensive until the bitter end..

"...Understood. I will."

She said after a not-so-short hesitation. It sounded like she just barely squeezed out the words.

"That so? Alright, then hurry up."

"Y-Yeah. Well then, Akito, please close your eyes. I also want you to turn your back towards me and lie down."

"Close my eyes and lie down? Why?"

"B-Because it's obviously embarrassing, you idiot!"

"Oh, that so? Sorry, sorry."

After being shouted at, I did as I was told.

But I wasn't flustered, I held a leisurely pace the whole time.

I don't mean to praise myself, but it was easy for me to keep my composure at times like this.

"How's that? How about this?"

"Y-Yeah. It's enough."

"It's up to you from here on out. I'll be in your care, alright?"

"...Yeah."

With that, Ginbei's tone changed:

"That's not for you to say, but this is in for a penny, in for a pound. You've come this far, and backing down would tarnish the Sawatari Family's dignity. Alright, got it. I'll do it. I'll totally do it."

*pachi*pachi*, a dry sound echoed.

She had probably clapped her cheeks to motivate herself.

"Alright, here I come."

There was no going back now.

There were signs of someone stepping closer.

I felt the futon being opened.

And a small figure invaded it.

"Alright. We're sleeping together."

"Yeah. That's right."

"Then let's stay like this for a while. I may be inexperienced, but please take care of me."

"Yeah. Got it."

Then the curtain of silence descended.



...Yep.

This was pretty, no, considerably, no, very problematic.

We had known each other for a long time, and we had become close friends. When

we first met, I had thought she was a boy, so I didn't feel any mental pressure — I was taking her too lightly. I've totally miscalculated.

I felt terribly tense. My heart was pounding.

I felt her clinging tightly onto my back, and even though she was slender, Ginbei felt really soft. Her small hand came and grabbed the back of my pyjamas. It was shaking, and I felt an intense instinctive urge to protect her. With the scent of her shampoo and soap, it was impossible to ignore that someone else was besides me.

Oh well.

Ginbei. Is. A. Girl.

When I thought about it, I felt that she had become increasingly girly since she transferred schools. Maybe being surrounded by the student council beauties had changed her? I didn't sense anything at all when we were in Kyoto, but lately she's suddenly... like that. Even though she's small enough to be mistaken for a grade schooler, she's developed in the right erotic places... and going deeper in, growth rate aside, she has outstanding 'raw materials'... Nono, this line of thought is unnecessary, yeah.

"Doesn't this bring back the past, Ginbei?"

To hide my thoughts, I tried to speak as normally as I could:

"Didn't we do this around the time we first met?"

"...What are you talkin' about?"

"C'mon, we slept like this before, didn't we? It was a different position."

"...You mean that? Yeah, of course I remember."

Ginbei was awfully quiet, and it was hard to hear her. Maybe my back had muffled her voice, but... that probably wasn't the *only* reason.

"You looked calm like you are now... it was as annoyin' as it could possible be."

"Nono, I didn't feel calm at all, not even a tiny bit. I faked it. I was younger back then."

"Hmph, really? I might not look like it, but I'm confident that no one can beat my eye for people. You've always been like that, standin' there by yourself and grinnin' as you looked down at my struggles. All composed, like a gentleman strokin' his kitten while he sips his brandy... I can't take it anymore. Like back then, I gathered all my courage, but..."

"Hm? Courage what? I didn't quite catch that."

"Shut up. It's fine if you didn't."

Ginbei said, tightly compressing lips shut.

"Hey, wait a sec, Ginbei."

"....."

“Let’s talk about something. It will be awkward if we’re silent and still like statues, you know? And we won’t have anything to do...”

“.....”

“Ginbei?”

“...C-Could you stop talking already?”

She finally replied, her tone helpless and her voice thin.

“Couldn’t you have just noticed that I was dealing with a who knows how embarrassin’ situation right now? Even if it was my idea, things are movin’ too fast. I didn’t expect to be driven into a corner... Just feeling how warm you back is, I’m... Uuuh...”

“Ah... Errr...”

“Shut up, be quiet. No more. If you say anything else, you’re as good as dead. Something’s going to happen to me if I notice your, er, ‘presence’ any more. Don’t open your mouth. Got it?”

“Yeah, right. Well... fine, I guess?”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s right! You’re sick to begin with. Your job is to rest up, and I’m helpin’ you with that. If we kept on chatting away like this, we’ll get our priorities mixed up. Alright, quiet down. Don’t say a word, no matter what. I’ll do the same.”

Then Genbei was silent, true to her word.

It was inevitable.

I got what I wanted.

The excitement had been getting to me since earlier, and frankly, I didn’t think I could easily fall asleep right now. But Ginbei had gone to great lengths to care for me, so I should just be grateful and do my best to get better, even if just a second faster. Yeah.

Same Day, 7:00 P.M. (Student Dormitory ▪ Manager Room) (Akiko's Turn)

My parents were still doing well. They didn't know about the blood relationship between the Himenokouji Family and me, and right now I didn't have to worry about family politics. When I was a kid, my body was weak, and I caught two or three colds per year. I think I depended on others.

Back in the day, my parents took care of all the daily necessities. They also dealt with everything regarding the Himenokouji Family. I relied on them when I was sick and lazily idled under the warm futon without a care in the world. It seemed natural to me, and I didn't question it.

Actually, from the day both of my parents passed away until today, I was the very picture of health. I was always free from that most common ailment: the cold. I was the iconic example that sickness and health start in the mind.

I was never sick during the six years I spent fighting to live with my little sister. It just wouldn't have been practical to be sick. The thought of my being bedridden, forced away from my sister even longer, was enough to ensure that I never let any virus rampage in my body.

There are also other cases showing how dependent I was on others. At the time, my parents' business didn't require them to travel all over the world nonstop, with no time to rest. They were busy businessmen at most. If I got sick, they would immediately take off from work and focus only on caring for me.

I really was a total kid.

Really, I didn't have a care in the world, and they worried about me. I didn't try to catch a cold on purpose, but I was simpleminded, and I took it for granted that they would drop everything for me if I said, 'Mum and dad, nurse me!'

Luckily, my parents were good people during that time, and it seemed that they treasured their time to be together with me. They nursed me without complaint, and nothing suggested that I and my weak body were a hindrance to their job. I have respect and affection for them because of this, even though they almost always just did as they pleased.

I loved being nursed by my parents. I loved having them constantly beside me, having them make tasty rice porridge for me, and having them feed me porridge. I loved it when they wiped me with a cool towel, changed my shirt and underwear, bought a toy that I liked, and kept their promises to play with me.

I sure was a spoiled child. I pestered everyone to my heart's content and relishing the taste of omnipotence. Back then, I was surely God.

But really, well... I was just being a kid.

I'd have slapped me if I was the parent, but my parents never raised their hand against me.

My favorite thing ever, above all, was when my mother let me sleep on her lap and, while caressing my head, she told me a story.

That was the main dish in the nursing repertoire, and speaking in movie terms, it was a worthy climax. I gave myself over to her, and the sensations of her soft lap and palms let me sink into an unmatched blissful sleep... Yeah, it'll always be in my top 5 list of family memories. It was beautiful——

*

While I hadn't realized it at all, but I had fallen asleep. I didn't notice any signs of falling asleep, but it seemed I was bolder than I had thought. Or maybe it was one of Ginbei's earlier treatments.

"Ah. Did you finally wake up?"

When I weakly opened my eyes, I could see my mother's nostalgic smile... No, that's not it. She certainly resembled my mother, who was a famous beauty, but...

"Oh, it's you, Akiko."

"What's with the 'oh'? Your cute little sister is doing everything she can to nurse you!"

I smiled wryly at my little sister, who had puffed up her cheeks. Then I finally realized.

I saw the familiar ceiling behind her sulking face. I felt a soft pressure on the back of my head, and a gentle touch on its front. Being between those two sensations warmed my heart.

"...Akiko..."

"Yes? What might it be?"

"This is an outrageous crime, you know? Giving me a lap pillow without my permission and stroking my head on top of it..."

"No, no. What are you saying?"

My sister was perfectly composed.

"Onii-chan, you've fallen ill. I'm supposed to take care of you, you were sleeping soundly, and on top of that, you looked pained. Under these circumstances, I have to do everything I can, and I've done just that. Rather, it would be strange of me to restrain myself, and if I did, I don't know what Nasuhara-san and Ginbei-san will say."

"Muu."

"Exactly, think of this as an emergency evacuation. I didn't do anything bad, and I dare say it's Onii-chan's fault for presenting me with such an opportunity. But, just for arguments sake, even if I *had* done something that would make Onii-chan angry later

on, I wouldn't have worried about it and given it my best anyway."

It's a sound argument. This time, I can't blame her.

And maybe it's because I'm a bit feverish, or because I just woke up so my head's dizzy, but I didn't feel like giving her a rebuttal. In truth, the lap pillow and head caressing felt incredible. It was absurd to resist.

Damn it. Akiko knew my weak spots.

This little sister remembered how much I loved it when my mom nursed me, didn't she? Going further, she might realize that she could make me completely dependent on her and I wouldn't even hate it... To put it simply, well, I knew how to deal with my sister, but this could reverse itself.

Oh dear. To think that our being together since we were born led to this—

"Please, let me to spoil you more."

My little sister suddenly raised her voice while I was secretly grinding my teeth.

"Onii-chan has been spoiling me since I was born. You spoiled me to my heart's content, no matter how much I wanted. That's why I've always been a burden."

"...Akiko?"

"I'm not dependable for other things, but I can do this. So what do you think?"

Akiko said with a smile.

"In any case, please take care of yourself. It would be a great embarrassment for me if you overworked yourself for my sake and get into trouble. Of course, you'd deny that you were in trouble, right?"

But if looked closer at her smile, I could see her lips slightly shaking. It was clear that she was doing her best to maintain her composure. She was acting bright and cheery on the outside, but I knew that internally her thoughts were a mess.

"So today, it's my turn to spoil you, Onii-chan. Like father and mother did in the old days, I'll be your hands and feet. Anything is fine. I'll even breath for you if I can. I've made up my mind, and I'll do it even if you don't want me to. Just for today, I won't listen to what Onii-chan says, even if it makes me a bad girl."

"Hmm... But you see..."

"Even if we see things differently, we want the same thing in the end, right?"

"That might be true, but this and that ar——"

"That's why, if you resist, I'll have to tie Onii-chan's hands and feet. I'd have no choice but to lovingly administer a mysterious drug so that Onii-chan will only want to be spoiled."

"Fine. Fine. I got it. I got it already."

I didn't want to, but I had to back down. I couldn't picture her actually doing that, but it

was true that I had made her worry unnecessarily. I'll listen obediently this time as an apology.

"Hmm. So you agree with me?"

Her uneasy expression was dissolved by a bright smile that surely blossomed from the bottom of her heart.

"Well then, please. Let me spoil you to bits! I'll give you anything you want."

"I see. Thanks. I won't hold you back."

I nodded and closed my eyes. I remained in the same position as before so that Akiko could stroke my head.

Yeah.

It felt really good.

It was shameful that I allowed this to happen. I was her guardian. I was supposed to protect her, but I ended up sick in her lap instead. But there were circumstances. It was an undeniable fact that sick patients needed treatment.

Right, there shouldn't be anything to worry about. I'm just granting her her wish to spoil me freely. As a brother, this is the best I can do.

Alright, it was decided. I'd let her spoil me. I also decided to take advantage of my being sick to have her do things I normally couldn't request.

"Akiko?"

"Yes. What might it be?"

"Just to confirm, but you'll do anything?"

"Of course. Himenokouji Akiko doesn't go back on her word."

"I see, then——"

In one breath I said:

"I was sleeping until a moment ago, and I think I have a lot of sweat. If possible, could you help me strip and wipe my body?"

It was hard to stop myself from grinning as I made my first request.

Fufu, well then, what will happen?

For her, an extreme brocon who sees me as a man, this should be a piece of cake. She should be overjoyed. But let's not be too hasty. This little sister of mine was bold in offense, but weak in defense. If you get past her armor, she'll crumble. And considering that she can't maintain her composure when I'm the one taking the offensive, I expect that she'll just be flustered and confused. 'Eh— Wai— What are you saying all of a sudden, Onii-chan?! My heart's not ready!' — something like that.

Maybe she'll put on a brave face and accept the request, even though she's obviously

confused and nervous. Yeah, that would be good sight to see.

If she doesn't accept, I could keep on teasing her. I'd be fine with that too. It's a win for me either way.

So, what will you do, Akiko?

Will you stammer nervously until you're at the end of the rope? After saying, 'I'll do anything,' what did you expect? Engrave this lesson onto your body; this is what happens when I hold the upper—

"Ah, wiping your body? I already did that."

"...Eh?"

"I already did it. It was while Onii-chan was sleeping."

My sister nonchalantly said.

"You were sweating a lot, and I was worried that your body would cool down, so... I went ahead and did it. Should I not have?"

"Eh? Nono, that's not it. In any case, thank you, Akiko."

"Not at all. You're very welcome."

My sister smiled at me, but it felt like I was missing something.

But now that she mentioned it, my skin did feel light and cool, especially considering that I was bedridden with a fever... I see, so she didn't think it was necessary to wait, and she just did it. I hadn't had the chance to wash up since I collapsed, so it's a matter of course, I guess.

But wouldn't it be boring if she did that so easily? I wanted to mercilessly make her blush, and watch her reactions when she had to touch me.

"Hm? Wait, I just realized..."

"Yes. What might it be?"

"I do feel refreshed, and I understand that you wiped my body while I slept. It was only natural since you wanted to do everything you could."

"Yes. That's exactly how it is."

"So, I'd like to ask one thing."

"Yes?"

"Did you, by any chance, wipe my *whole* body?"

Akiko replied a completely normally:

"Yes, I wiped all the sweat. From every corner of your body."

Oou... seriously?

But it made sense. She could have easily wiped places like my arm or my face, but they don't sweat that much. So it would've been meaningless if she didn't wipe my whole body.

And as expected of my little sister, I could tell that she put her heart into it. It seems she even added a minty flavor or something to the towel. If I paid attention, the cool, faint sensation from the passing air felt really good... especially around the area between my legs.

...Uwa. What was this?

Why was I the one who was blushing?

"Are you alright, Onii-chan? Your face turned red."

"Eh? Ah, no, errr. Of course I'm fine. No problem, no problem at all."

I hurriedly explained myself. Things weren't heading in a good direction.

Making Akiko blush was my signature move, my privilege! She definitely wasn't allowed to make *me* blush.

I had to restore my dignity as an older brother.

"Akiko. I've got a favor to ask."

"Yes. What might it be?"

"In truth, I'm a bit hungry. I'd like something to eat. Rice porridge or fruits will."

"This won't be a problem. When you have an appetite, eating will speed up your recovery. Well then, I'll prepare something to eat at on——"

"Ah, I have another favor to ask."

"Yes. What might it be?"

"Yeah. Well, you see, I'd like you to go 'aaaan' and feed me. You wouldn't mind, right?"

"Of course. I intended to do that from the start."

...Th- Whaaat?

"I'll be Onii-chan's hand and feet for whatever you need. It's only natural since I'm nursing you, right? Well then, I'll prepare something immediately, so——"

"Ah. Wait, wait a sec. Now that I think about it, I already ate a lot earlier, and my stomach still feels heavy. Eating wouldn't be too good an idea."

I frantically stopped her.

If Akiko didn't lose it and blush right now, it wouldn't be fun at all. Her immediate agreement signaled my utter defeat in this battle. She really would go 'aaan' and feed me. If that happened, I'd be the one who'd blush for sure, and my dignity...

Damn it, was I too naive? Or was I just too lenient?

Okay. In this case, I needed to get serious too.

This time there's no holding back. I'll have her surrender right here and now with my strongest move!

"Hey, Akiko? Rather than that, I'd like something else."

"Yes. What might it be?"

"Yeah. I'm sorry, but can you kiss me?"

"Ah, I already kissed Onii-chan while he was asleep."

"YOU SERIOUS—?!"

I hadn't thought of that.

But Akiko did say that she 'wanted to attack Onii-chan in his sleep' many times. Although she never got further than an attempt, and time and again Akiko proved that she was all bark and no bite. But really, why I didn't notice her stealing my lips...?

"No. I was just kidding."

"Ah. A joke? Thank God..."

"But if Onii-chan wishes me to, I will kiss him with pleasure. I don't see how it has anything to do with nursing though."

"Ah, no. It's fine. It doesn't have anything to do with nursing, yep."

"...? Onii-chan, aren't you acting weird? Anyway, I'll do anything if it helps you recover. Tell me immediately if you want something. Don't hold back."

When Akiko said that, her eyes were earnest and serious. I could tell that she meant it — her only concern was my recovery. Anyway, it was clear that wholeheartedly determined, and that she would do a lot for me even though my health had only deteriorated a little. Her attitude made me embarrassed for myself. I realized that I really wanted to tease my sister and see her get flustered as always. I was embarrassed that I had such impure motives.

"...I've often said that my mother was strong, but the same goes for my sister, huh?"

"Yes? Did you say something, Onii-chan?"

"No. Nothing."

I smiled wryly before nodding.

"It's fine, Akiko. This cold is nothing, and to make matters worse, you had to nurse me — Nasuhara-san and Ginbei have already taken care of me, so it'll be fine. I'll get rid of this cold before long. No, I'll force it leave."

"Yes, of course. Don't worry about anything else."

My little sister agreed, her smile a blooming flower. I closed my eyes.

Like I said, I need to get rid of this cold. I should get plenty of sleep since it's one of the most effective things against a cold. I'll do my best to drift into unconsciousness. No problem. This fiasco notwithstanding, I've always been proud of my resilience. If I think of it that way, this cold should be gone in one day.

The doctor had prescribed three to four days of bed rest, and I had intended to do just that. I also needed to be ready for school, which was about to get really busy. However, I changed my mind. I can't keep on being this lazy.

As for why, it's because now I have a reason to do this. I have to get rid of this cold quickly so that Akiko reverts to her usual self — the Himenokouji Akiko who's clings to me all the time and approaches me shamelessly, yet turns into a good-for-nothing when push comes to shove. This was now my absolute number one priority. If I fail, I'll lose my dignity as an older brother.

May 11th, 1:00 P.M. (Student Dormitory - Manager Room) (Prez' Turn)

So, just like they said, my cold was cured in one day.

That was impressive, if I do say so myself. I did feel some traces of sickness, and parts of my body still felt heavy, so I wasn't completely cured. Indeed, I was still stuck in my futon. However, my fever and the swelling in my throat had mostly subsided. I felt terribly grateful to everyone who had nursed me and given me the resolve to recover.

I guess it was true that health and sickness start in the mind.

"Jeez. Ye gotta take better care of yer body, ya know?"

Prez smiled. She had come to visit me.

"And here the doc said ya had to rest for three or four days. He wasn't some quack, was he? Just in case, I had picked him since he had best reputation 'round here."

"Well, my sturdy body is one of my strong points."

"Nono. Even if yer sturdy, yer body was so broken that ya collapsed. It wasn't somethin' that could be fixed that in a day. Or maybe yer some genius in feigning illness? You could make your tonsils swell and control yer body temperature?"

"I can't do that..."

Incidentally, the ninja in Yamadafuu Tarou's story could do those things.

"Well, in any case, I'm glad. I was thinkin' this was my fault too. I'm glad it didn't turn into anything serious."

"What are you saying? As I've said before, it was only because I didn't take care of myself. It's not your fault at all."

"That might be how ya see it, but I see it differently. I'll make sure to make this up to you, so forgive me, aight?"

This was the forever unyielding prez, single-minded and impossibly stubborn.

"By the way, Himenokouji Akito. Who won?"

"...? Won what?"

"Who was the MVP nurse?"

Ah.

Now that she mentioned it. I had completely forgotten.

"Of course, it ain't a competition, and I only proposed it to calm 'em down. But just in

case, pick a winner. It should give the girls peace of mind if you settled things.”

“Well, that might be true, but... huh? I’ve got to choose?”

“Who else could?”

“Well, you, for one?”

“Don’t talk like an idiot. Am I in any position to judge them? They want you to be the judge, not me.”

“Well, that might be true, but...”

“For them, this is important. Their pride is on the line. Man up and judge ’em sternly. Don’t worry about convention; judge ’em on your own terms.

I reluctantly considered it.

Nasuhara-san — Well, I can’t really call that nursing, but nonetheless, her spirit got through to me. Although, she was always promoting her two-man comedy act and showing her lack of wisdom. Practically speaking, keeping me company was the best thing about her ‘nursing.’

Ginbei — She had essentially given me a three day feast of Chinese delicacies, taking out every folk remedy and nutritional supplement in existence. Their efficacy aside, she put a lot of effort into it, and it was heartwarming. Honestly, I didn’t know why she’d even sleep with me, but that did put our strong bond in a new light, and it definitely helped me recover both physically and psychologically.

And Akiko — Yeah, she was the strongest in a way. On top of understanding exactly what I wanted, her splendid nursing had an unmistakably familial touch to it. At the same time, she totally threw off her usual character. I was struck by her enthusiasm to accept my everything just like a Bosatsu or Kannon. It wouldn’t be exaggerating to say that she nursed me with all she had.

I was grateful to all of them. Picking one over the others was entirely absurd.

On top of that, I’d make matters worse no matter who I picked... they were completely even to begin with. It would be best to call it a draw. But if I had to pick, I guess I’d have to make them do penalty kicks, like they do in football...

“I understand. Then I’ll pick.”

“Aight. Come at me.”

“Let me confirm one thing before we go though. I can choose however I want, right?”

“Ye, of course. You’re the only judge. There ain’t any grading systems like in figure skatin’. Yer may pick the winner however ye like. No prob.”

“I understand. Well then, I’ll tell you my conclusion.”

I wasn’t reluctant to reply, but I took a deep breath nonetheless.

And, like she said, I chose a winner on my own terms.

"This time, the MVP is prez."

"...Haa?"

"It's you, prez. Nikaidou Arashi, you're the champion, the most valuable player. Congratulations!"

"Nono. What are ya sayin'?"

Prez recovered from her puzzled expression and looked down on me, shocked.

"Ya listenin' to what people say? I told'cha to choose who did the best nursin', aight?"

"Yeah. That's why I chose prez."

"...No, The ones who nursed ya were gold, silver, and black hair, right? I didn't give you one pill and didn't feed'cha one bite. Nor did I put a wet towel on yer forehead or checked yer temperature. Well, I did pick the doc, but..."

"Doing nothing is also nursing."

I explained while smiling.

"It's my fault too that I suddenly collapsed. But it was just a cold, you know? Even the doctor said that. And in hindsight, it was cured in as short as one day, too. With that in mind, having three people nurse me — what am I, a prince?"

"Well... that might be true."

"This might be rushed. I'm very grateful to them for worrying about me and looking after me, but — frankly speaking, they overreacted. It was just a cold."

You can make fun of someone by over-praising them, so couldn't you do the same by over-nursing them?

Even if everyone had told me not to hold back, to ask for anything, how could I seriously treat myself like a king? I was grateful for their warm care, but again, my illness would have resolved itself on its own. It was overkill to do as much as they did; they had cut the paper with a sword instead of scissors.

"You thought the same thing, so you didn't do anything, right? You wanted to avoid a situation where I'd have to deal with four people ganging up on me."

"Hm... Well, that's true."

"So, at least at the beginning, prez paid the most attention to what I needed. You were the only one who calmly assessed the situation. I am glad to have had Nasuhara-san, Ginbei, and Akiko nurse me, and they were also reliable, but that's another matter. The MVP in the shadows was prez. That's unshakeable."

I said, smiling at the red-haired trickster.

"Properly accept the honor. Nikaidou Arashi-san, you were the most valuable player. Congratulations."

"...Yare, yare."

Prez sighed as she rubbed her chin with a bitter expression.

"It seems it's also a problem if my subordinate is too shrewd for his own good, eh? You know, they say that ignorance is bliss, right?"

"Well, yes. Thank you."

"Got it. Then let's call it a draw this time. If they keep on fighting, you'll have to take care of it yourself. Ya fine with that?"

"Understood."

As expected of prez, this might be what they call a tacit understanding. Or you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours? What did we need to do to settle it most peacefully? She understood my thoughts without my having to say anything. For the people at the top, it was important to know when to let someone else take the credit.

"...Hey, listen, Himenokouji Akito."

"Eh? What?"

"Don't 'what' me, ya have been smirking since earlier. It's disgusting. What exactly is so funny?"

"No, nothing. Just, well, the expression you made when you realized that I caught on to something I wasn't supposed to know... it was relatively lovely."

"You... don't'cha get cocky. If yer gonna say that stuff carelessly, I ain't gonna show any mercy just because yer sick."

After that threat, as if to say 'this topic's over,' she waved her hands. Her face was just a bit red, and of course it because she had a fever. Surprisingly, it seems like this kind of situation made her weak.

"Well, I can't say I cleared mah debt just yet."

While I was inwardly congratulating myself at having the upper hand for once, prez suddenly said that.

"Debt? What debt?"

"I'm to blame for your medical negligence. Honestly, how can ya pretend otherwise?"

"Nono. What are you saying?"

Half amazed, I continued:

"It's my own fault for catching a cold. Well, I am packed with responsibilities here, but that's no excuse. To say nothing of there being no reason for you to feel responsible."

"Ya might think that way, but as yer superior, I have my own responsibilities."

Her stubborn claim showed that she had a surprisingly strong sense of responsibility.

"To prevent this from happenin' again, I'll need to reassess the dorm and the student council. That's my own way of taking responsibility."

“Well, I don’t mind if that’s what you want. But... what do you plan to change?”

“Getting more people.”

Her reply was simple and clear.

“We’ve been talking about it for a while now. I’ll appoint a new dorm manager. Putting it harshly, we’ve purposely pushed every responsibility onto ya. To settle this quickly, we’ll get a new dorm manager, as was originally planned, and they’ll do yer job. That’ll clear things up.”

If it was like that, I had no objections.

I had been quite busy for a long time, so I looked forward to having a new dorm manager.

“Rest assured. I’ve already got mah sights on someone extraordinary. Negotiations were tough, but... no need to fret. I swear on the honor of mah name that I’ll get’chu the best dorm manager there is.”

Prez gave me a thumbs up, and it felt more reliable than any contract or agreement we could’ve made. Maybe it seemed that way because I hadn’t completely recovered yet.

*

...Well, with that... this chapter of my life, the one where my health crumbled for the first time in years, came to a close.

When I announced results of that nursing contest — which had completely exhausted me, by the way — all the participants responded with raging protests, as I expected. They had given it their all, and they intensely objected the ambivalent result, again as expected. I had intended to pacify them, but I ended up in a dire state of distress... again. But that’s another story.

May 14th, 7:00 P.M. (Student Dormitory ▪ Dining/Conference Room)

Three days later:

“Hey, listen, ya’ll. We decided on the new dorm manager.”

Prez brought this up during dinner. As usual, we were in the dining/conference room.

“Accordin’ to the board of directors, the manager we talked about before will be here first thing tomorrow morning. Well, let’s give ‘em a warm welcome.”

“...Eh? Seriously?”

I, representing both the boarding students and the manager, replied in puzzlement.

“Well, we did talk about it, but that was fast... We haven’t had time to prepare, you know? I’m still using the manager’s room, and we don’t know how the chores...”

“They’re just greetin’ us for now, ya know? No need for the fuss. They goin’ to move in first ‘n startin’ the job later.”

“Right...”

“Well, at any rate, the new manager wants to meet us. I think the faster we get to know one another, the better.”

I found myself agreeing with her. This was short notice, but the management here took things one at a time.

“What kind of person is he?”

Akiko raised her hand.

“I asked for a woman when we discussed it before, but...”

“Yeah, I went with yer suggestion. She’s a woman.”

Muu, I see...

That’s too bad. Being surrounded by nothing but girls was a little embarrassing, and if the new manager had been a male... So the male count was going to stay at 1. Maybe this dorm had a penchant for women.

“Can you guarantee that she’s very skilled?”

Ginbei asked this time.

“I requested someone diligent and reliable, but not unpleasant to live with. I wonder how well she fits the bill.”

“Rest assured, Gingin, she meets all of yer requirements. I already tested her to

make sure she's up to snuff. I couldn't get'cha interview with her too, but we're gonna have a trial period. Ye can fire her if her working style's stickin' in yer throat."

"Hmm, excellent. So basically, you followed my requests as much as you could. Very satisfying indeed."

Ginbei nodded deeply.

She met everyone's requirements, and it would be fantastic if she was a great manager on top of that. We had to thank prez and the board of directors for this.

"I wonder if my wishes were granted?"

And lastly, Nasuhara-san interjected.

"I'm not concerned about the race or gender, but I believe that I asked for a cute manager."

"Kukuku. Who do ya think I am? Whenever I say 'leave it to me', it usually means I'll do it." She's cute, alright.

While grinning like an hostess club advertiser out on the street, prez puffed up her chest with pride.

But this is a dorm manager, you know? And she found a cute one?

"Well, everyone's tastes are different, so I wouldn't know if ya prefer glasses or somethin', but... generally speakin', she's plenty cute. I doubt I could find anyone who wouldn't find her cute — she's that high level — so rest assured."

"I understand. Incidentally, is she under 150 cm and 40 kg, as I previously specified?"

"That was no kyabakura interview, ya know? How am I supposed to know those details?"

Even though prez said that, she was grinning. Prez continued:

"Rest assured. I'd say she meets those standards with plenty of room to spare."

"I see. Then I must say that I'm relieved. Even for the student council president, your performance is truly commendable."

Nasuhara-san was expressionless as she gave her rare high praise..

"But prez..." I tilted my head and continued, "All things considered, you did good to find her. Everyone gave you many conditions, and to be frank they were rather arbitrary. I wouldn't have thought that you could meet them all."

"Indeed, the new manager is talented."

Making a self-satisfied face, Prez rubbed her chin and continued:

"And there's more. She has an amazin' academic background. She has credits from a well known prestigious academy, and her papers are published in professional magazines, ya know?"

"That's amazing. She's beyond our imagination, huh?"

"And when she started writin' those papers, she was about ten years old."

"Oooh, isn't she a genius? Really amazing."

"And now the best part, she's from one of Japan's most famous families. She's got brains, is good-lookin', 'n is even blessed with good lineage. Your picture-perfect princess, eh? Nah, really, I'm relieved I managed to hit such a bullseye."

"...Rather, is it really alright to have her manage our dorm?"

"Who knows? She said herself that she wanted to, so ain't it alright?"

If she wanted this, we probably shouldn't object. Even so, is this really the right place for her? It feels Leonardo da Vinci's coming to work as a convenience store clerk.

"Well, anyway, that's how it turned out."

Prez concluded.

"It's true dorm manager and us boarding students are in different positions, but we're still comrades livin' under the same roof. She'll probably be tense 'cause it's an unfamiliar place filled with strangers, so let's tactfully welcome her, aight?"

After being told that, I had no objections.

She was so capable that any place would be dying to recruit her, and yet she was coming especially to live and work in this worn-down dorm. Of course we had to welcome her.

...

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Yeah, that's how it is.

Somehow I can't help getting the feeling that she's moving like I did for various reasons. Is it just me?

*

It wasn't just me.

"N-Nice to meet you, everyone."

The next morning, we greeted the new dorm manager. We met her in the entranceway, and everyone was rendered speechless.

"I'm still inexperienced, but from now on I'll work as hard as I can. Please take good care of me!"

bow.

After bowing politely, she raised her face again. Her expression was tense.

She had childlike face with big eyes, full cheeks, and lips the color of cherry blossoms. Her chestnut colored hair hung in natural loose waves over her sloping, thin shoulders.

Her intelligent gaze emanated competence. She was shorter and more slender than Ginbei, so her height and weight were lower than 150 cm and 40 kg. As for how cute she was, I'd say that she could immediately start as an idol or a model.

Now I understood. This girl was definitely someone prez could be proud of. It seems I had forgotten what kind of person our president Nikaidou Arash was.

The reason Nasuhara-san, Ginbei, and Akiko stood there speechless could only be because our newly appointed dorm manager was barely over 12 years.

Why did I know that she was hardly older than 12? That's easy. I knew her. She was extremely close to me.

"Imma introduce her."

Prez, being the only one in good humor, patted our new dorm manager on the shoulder.

"I'm Takanomiya Arisa. Starting today, I've been assigned as this dorm's manager... By the way, Himenokouji Akito should know me very well, right?"

That's right. I knew her. Of course I did. There was no way I wouldn't.

"...Ehe. Please take good care of me. Okay, Akito-niisama?"



She gave us her best smile. The name of this girl with that slightly awkward smile was Takanomiya Arisa. She was from the same Takanomiya Family that had taken care of me until recently.

She was also my fiancée.

Credits

Author	—	(鈴木大輔) Suzuki Daisuke
Illustrator	—	(閏月戈) Gekka Uruu
Publisher	—	<u>(メディアファクトリー) Media Factory</u>
Translator	—	<u>cautr</u>
Editor	—	cautr
TLC	—	Hiyono lucille
Proofread	—	Pkill
Book designer	—	<u>Armaell</u>

お兄ちゃんだけで
愛さえてあげれば
関係ないよわっ

Daisuke Suzuki
鈴木大輔
Illustration
閏月戈

4

どうでえ？

あたしもそこそこ
イケんだろ？



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